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SPECIAL! RAY BRADBURY ASKS:
"WHERE ARE THE GOLDEN-EYED MARTIANS?"

PERRY RHODAN

ITS A MATTER OF LIFE & DEATH FOR—

PERRY RHODAN—The Umpire of the Solar Empire.

REGINALD BELL—*Rhodan's* 2d-in-Command.

ATLAN—The Immortal Arkonide from the Time of Atlantis.

JOHN MARSHALL, ANDRE NOIR, RAS TSCHUBAI—Members of the Mutant Corps.

DR. SKOLDSON—Head of the Med Dept., spaceship *Drusus*.

DR. ALI EL JAGAT—Chief mathematician, *Drusus*.

CAPT. HUBERT GORLAT—Specialist in weaponry.

LT. MIKEL TOMPETCH—Valued assistant to Rhodan.

LT. MARCEL ROUS—Terranian of French birth who has a berth aboard the *Drusus*.

SGT. SULLIVAN—Bit player.

HOMUNK—Important robot.

CQ-1238—Minor battle robot.

NATHAN—Intelligent seacow of planet Solitude.

LLANDRINDOD—Earl of Guye, a medieval knight.

PEYREFITTE OF SHERWOOD—One of the Rhomen known by another name at another time.

LIVE THEIR DEATH-DEFYING ADVENTURES!

PERRY RHODAN: Peacelord of the Universe

Series and characters created and directed by Karl-Herbert Scheer and Walter Ernsting.

ACE BOOKS EDITION

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Perry Rhodan

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DEATH WAITS IN SEMISPACE

by

Kurt Mahr

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DEDICATION

To the Memory of

HAL ZEISMAN

Forest Ranger & Fire Fighter
of Canada
Subscriber to what he called
"That fantastic farout Series"
Died of a heart attack
August 1974
Sorry, friend.
Forry & Wendy Ackerman

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STARDUST EDITORIAL
Leon Myerson
Guest Writer
"A Character with Character"

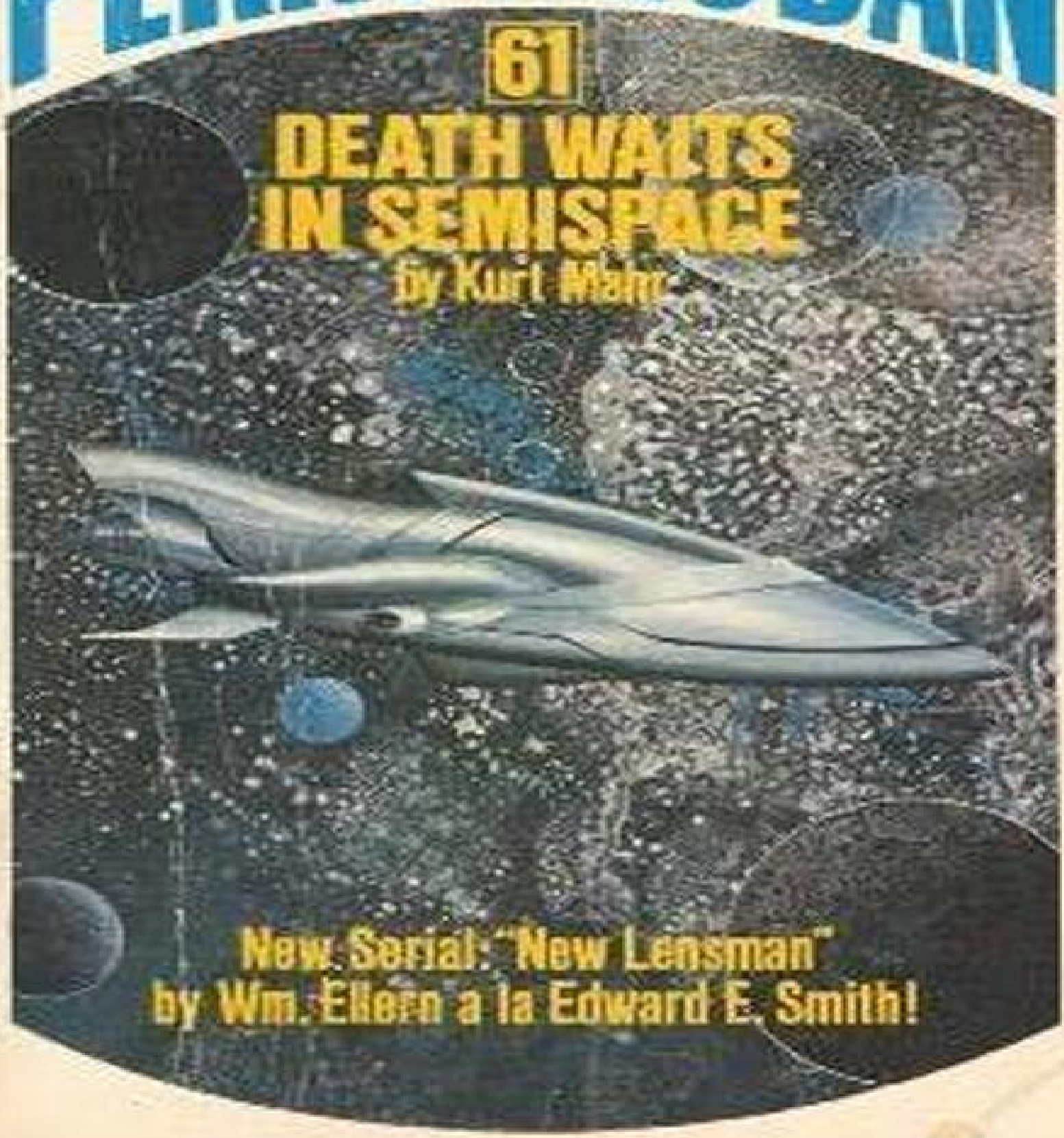
ENTERPRISE STARDUST, back in '69, was the first PR book I picked up and since then I have read every volume of Rhodan's galactic exploits as soon as they were published. Altho PERRY RHODAN is space opera it happens to be very good space opera. I am one of the series' oldest & most dedicated fans.

What got me hooked was the character of Perry Rhodan himself. He is a man who was suddenly propelled from the normal world of 20th Century Earth into a galactic realm of vast wealth & power. But he is neither overawed by it nor does he use his position to obtain power for its own sake. Instead he rose above the obvious temptation and his early military background to rescue Earth from self-destruction and to lead it in its first faltering ventures into the galaxy.

I have greatly enjoyed the slow process of building the New Power consisting of a tiny ship and its energy dome into the Solar Empire, a force to be reckoned with. Yet despite this vast progress, Perry is still the underdog when compared to the Arkonides, Springers, Aras and the other powers that be in the galaxy. Thus he cannot succeed by the use of force alone but only by use of his talents of leadership, organization & planning. It is this factor which raises PERRY RHODAN above the other attempts at space opera.

SPECIAL! RAY BRADBURY ASKS:
"WHERE ARE THE GOLDEN-EYED MARTIANS?

PERRY RHODAN



BETWEEN DIMENSIONS! *DIMENSION 4... DIMENSION 5... AND SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN–*

SEMISPACE!

The unknown realm of the halfplane must be penetrated if the planet Wanderer is to be reached in time. For it is the year 2042, the critical date when Perry Rhodan and Reginald Bell must have a biological booster from the physiotron on the artificial world: without the cell shower renewal they will degenerate into old age!

The venture between the dimensions turns them temporarily into giants who cause devastating storms as they cross an entire ocean with one step!

But even giants can be felled (as David demonstrated to Goliath) and our intrepid Terranians discover that—

DEATH WAITS IN SEMISPACE

1/ TSCHUBAI: TRAPPED!

A PLANET: MISSING!

An emptiness, a void, a spatial nothingness where a world should whirl on its axis and revolve in its orbit.

Mystery was all that the dark green vidscreen of the sensor device reported to Perry Rhodan as he scanned it in vain for any evidence of the planet Wanderer.

A few minutes before, the super battleship Drusus had entered hypertransition a few light-years from its present position. The hytrans should have terminated within 10 light-minutes of the location where, according to the mathmen's calculations, the mysterious planet Wanderer should now be found.

Wanderer was the artificial world to which Perry Rhodan had to return by May 1, 2042 if he were to remain a limited basis immortal. Only on Wanderer—also known as Pel, the Planet of Eternal Life—was the miracle-

working device to be found, the instrument of new strength for the human body, the process that would protect flesh and bone from decay.

It, master of Wanderer, the accumulated, amalgamated consciousness of a long-vanished race, had first given Rhodan the right to receive the cell renewal 62 years before. The privilege extended also to all those in Rhodan's company whom the Terran deemed worthy of immortality. At the time the robot Homunk had advised him that the cell renewal had to be undergone again every 62 years if it were to remain effective and continue to ward off the deterioration of age.

Those 62 years would be up in eight days.

Eight frightfully short days, fraught with destiny.

Without Wanderer and its wonder-working entity, death lay waiting for the Administrator of the Solar Empire and his second-in-command, just a week and a day away.

Perry Rhodan had already lost invaluable time, following the trail of Pel through an alien time-plane. He had obtained information about the planet's galactic position only at the penultimate moment.

The Drusus had immediately shot off to seek out the artificial planet.

Considered rationally, there could be no doubt whatsoever that Wanderer was to be found somewhere within 10 lems—10 light-minutes—of the ship... a radius of 180,000,000 kilometers. The information obtained from the captured Druuf robot had indicated as much without any possibility of error.

But Perry Rhodan had increased the range of the sensor to 25 lems—and the depths of space nevertheless remained devoid of planetary mass.

The command center of the Drusus was fully manned. Feverish activity reigned at every post where one could hope the equipment might unravel the mystery of the vanished planet Pel—the Wanderer. Matter sensors microwave and hypercom locating devices operated, radiating their waves, but no echo returned. Wanderer remained hidden. Meanwhile, the astrogation section had reported that the transition had smoothly taken place and the ship had arrived with minuscule error at its intended destination. There seemed to be only one explanation: the information taken from the

captured Druuf robot had been wrong. Either the Druufs themselves did not know where Wanderer had gone or else the robot had the ability to falsify programmed information when it realized an alien wanted it.

The first faint clue as to the fate of the artificial world came from a direction no one would have suspected. While Perry Rhodan was busy expanding the radius of the matter sensor, which in reality was no more than an indicator of gravitational fields, to 50 light-minutes, the red cell-light on the intercom screen on the upper edge of the pilot's console lit up. Rhodan closed the connection with a mechanical hand movement and looked absentmindedly at the face appearing on the screen.

"Structural sensor station, sir! Sgt. Sullivan reporting," said the man. "Our equipment is registering an effect we've never observed before, sir. I thought it important enough to call you directly."

Rhodan nodded. It still seemed unlikely to him that of all things the structure sensor would have discovered something in connection with the disappearance of the planet Wanderer but in the present situation he could not let even the slightest clue go by without taking a look at it. "Describe your readings and show me the oscillogram. Or is there an oscillogram?"

Sgt. Sullivan looked unhappy. "Yes, there is one," he admitted hesitantly, "but it looks as though the oscilloscope is deranged."

Rhodan smiled. "Show it to me, anyway."

Sullivan's face disappeared and a few seconds went by while he connected the vidscreen with the oscilloscope.

Then the screen lit up again. The coordinate grid of the oscilloscope field became visible and through the network snaked a confusion of irregular lines that moved constantly up and down.

Sgt. Sullivan's voice began to explain. "A normal reception consists of a single bundle of waves which are short or long depending on the object's ultimate velocity as it returns to the 4-dimensional continuum, as well as the distance and size of the object being spotted and fixed. The bundle displays the structure of a damped wave: large amplitude at the beginning, then an exponential dying away.

"But as you can see, sir, that isn't the case here. Here we are not dealing with a damped wave. The amplitude of the different vibrations is smaller by a factor of a hundred than the weakest shockwave we've ever registered. We first received this 15 minutes ago and it's continued unchanged ever since. A normal such reception lasts at most a few milliseconds, sir."

Rhodan had listened attentively while studying the irregular wave-pattern. Sgt. Sullivan's explanation was complete; there was nothing Rhodan could have added to explain the situation.

"Do you have any ideas, Sergeant?" he asked. "Any guesses as to how this phenomenon has come about?"

Sullivan hesitated in answering. "N-no, sir," he said finally. "No idea at all. Only..."

Rhodan patiently waited until Sullivan had overcome his misgivings.

"...Only it looks like there is something in the area that would like to enter hyperspace but can't decide one way or the other. Perhaps it doesn't have enough power or perhaps the pilot is only probing hyperspace carefully first before venturing in. That's all I can say, sir."

"Yes, your guess is a logical one," Rhodan freely admitted. "Give the oscillograms to the mathematicians and ask them for an evaluation, Sergeant."

Then he broke off the connection. The odd flickering disappeared from the vidscreen but it remained in Rhodan's mind where it produced some thoughts that seemed absurd at first. Only by closer examination did they prove to have nothing impossible in them, especially when one considered that here was a phenomenon no one had ever observed anywhere else: the passage of a planet through an alien time-plane.

Rhodan had a number of ideas and as he looked at the automatic calendar he knew that he did not have the time to toy with them and finally pick out the most likely one.

He would have to go down the list of his ideas and try them out one by one.

• • •

"I'm afraid," said Rhodan, "that the problems in connection with the disappearance of Wanderer are not easy to understand and for those of you who have not yet had the time to study the theory of differing rates of time those problems will be well-nigh incomprehensible. In any event, however, we must not lose any time with explanations.

"Wanderer has crossed into an alien time-plane. The Druufs captured it, but It , the incomprehensible lord of the artificial world, was able to outwit them. It left the Druuf plane at another location, taking Its entire planet along.

"But evidently the Immortal Unknown was not entirely successful. Something strange happened to Wanderer when it left the alien time-plane. It does not exist in our space. Perhaps it emerged from the alien time-plane carrying a thin edge of alien time with it or perhaps it has created a zone of spatial instability around itself. We don't know but we must find out.

"Here you see a Lens System has been installed. With the help of these devices we have already been able to penetrate the alien dimension a few times." He pointed to a small box-shaped mechanism sitting on the table in front of him and to two opaque shimmering rings of light floating motionless in the air. The lower edge of the rings was only a few centimeters above the floor. Rhodan continued: "Lt. Rous has already announced himself ready to take the step. For now we can only hope that he will succeed in reaching Wanderer in this manner."

Marcel Rous stepped forward. He wore a spacesuit and had already closed the helmet. He did not know where he would come out. It was plain to see that he was feeling uncomfortable. The Lens System, known also as the Mirror Field, created a bridge between the two time-planes at those points where the planes were at the moment overlapping or had intersected in the past. If Wanderer had really taken along some of the alien rate of time and was to be found in the area, then Rous would disappear as soon as he had stepped into the first light ring and emerged on Wanderer. If not—well, no one had yet experienced what would happen by stepping through the Mirror Field when no alien time-plane waited on the other side.

Rous gripped the weapon he wore at his side for one last time then saluted briefly and stepped into the light ring. For a moment Rhodan had

the impression that Rous had disappeared but then he saw a leg, then the other leg and finally the entire lieutenant emerge from the other light ring.

The attempt had failed. Rhodan's first idea had proved wrong.

Rous was surprised: one could see that much on his face through the faceplate of his helmet.

Someone started to laugh. Another person joined in and finally the almost unbearable tension that had held everyone spellbound dissolved in resounding laughter. Even Rous laughed: it could be heard from the exterior loudspeaker on his helmet.

Rhodan was the only one unaffected by the general merriment. He looked at the calendar. The date was 24 April, just after 0200 hours. Remaining to him now were just 190 hours in which to find out what had happened to Wanderer and to enter the Physiotron with the life-prolonging cell shower. Rhodan had no reason to laugh. Now he remembered the second idea he had had. Wanderer was no longer moving through the alien time-plane. It was subject to the same rate of time as the Drusus , the Earth and all the billions of stars visible on the vidscreen. If Wanderer could not be reached with the help of the Mirror Field, then perhaps someone would be able to find it if he had the help of natural, inborn powers.

It was time for the mutants to go to work!

• • •

Ras Tschubai knew what was being asked of him. Up to now no mission had frightened him off but this time he was afraid.

Perry Rhodan had left it up to him to decide whether he wanted to make the spring or not. Rhodan had described the situation and openly admitted that not even what little paramechanical theory, which had been worked out, was enough to reckon any odds about the success or failure of the proposed leap. No one knew what would happen when Ras Tschubai, the tall African, mobilized his psychic power and attempted to reach Wanderer with a teleportation jump.

Nevertheless, Ras Tschubai had decided to make the jump. He had put on a spacesuit and had made his appearance in the control room. With their

tense but friendly faces, the officers around Ras Tschubai seemed to be trying to encourage him but he knew they would not be able to help him if he got into trouble. His paramechanical talent operated in a higher, 5-dimensional space; if something happened to him there, he was lost. He would float through a grey universe in which there was nothing but himself as a dematerialized figure until the end of time.

Ras Tschubai closed his eyes and began to concentrate. He knew where he was to look for Wanderer. The crew at the Warp sensors had previously reported the location in space that was the source of the unusual signs of spatial instability.

He forced his thoughts in the direction of where he wanted to spring. He had no more time to be afraid and waste a portion of his attention on his feelings. He had to see something—at least an outline of his goal—in order to spring at all.

The darkness before his eyes began to lighten. He saw colored rings dance in the gloom and in the distance a bright but indistinct spot. The spot attracted his attention; if there was a place to spring at all, then the spot had to be it. Ras began to tremble with impatience. He felt how the sweat ran down his forehead and how the individual drops were sucked up by his suit's air conditioning, leaving a salty crust behind. As he sensed that, the pale fleck shrank into the distance, becoming almost invisible.

What's the use, Ras Tschubai thought desperately: I'll never get there. He concentrated his attention for awhile on the colored rings dancing about in front of the light spot, which were nothing more than an optical illusion brought about by his eyes being so tightly closed. He followed their flittering over the entire black range of his vision, trying to count them. It kept him so occupied he forgot the surroundings and his fear. When he turned his attention to the light spot once more, he saw that it had grown brighter and larger than before. Ras Tschubai stared at it and as he realized that it was not getting any bigger, he decided to go ahead.

Now!

The spot came whirling towards him. He felt himself being drawn weightless through space. The darkness at the edges of the spot grew smaller and after an immeasurably small span of time, only the bright and

burning light was before Ras Tschubai's eyes. He wanted to relax, wanted to put his feet on the ground and open his eyes like he did on all the other occasions when he had made a successful spring. He knew that now he was there , or here , wherever it might be, and for a moment he felt a dull surprise because everything was different from the usual.

He tried to stretch out but there was no ground to be reached with his feet. There was also nothing to hold on to. Only the light was before him, burning with the brightness of a sun—and Ras was hurtling straight towards it. He raised his hands to protect his face but that was of no use: everything he saw was through closed eyes by way of the strange powers of his mind. He wanted to scream, not realizing no one would be able to hear his scream —but at that moment the torture came to an end with a thundering explosion that struck him full force and knocked him into the void. He saw how the light grew smaller and disappeared into the dark distance. He heard the ringing of metal as his feet struck something.

Then he lost consciousness.

• • •

As he came to, he tried to stand up. And he realized he could not. He seemed to be confined in a space that had been molded around his body. It was just as long as he was and had the same girth as he did.

Minutes went by before he had won back enough of his memory to know what had happened. He had tried to reach Wanderer by way of teleportation. He had sprung and for a brief time had had the sensation of a normal leap. Then something had exploded and thrown him into this coffin-like chamber. What kind of chamber was this? Where was it? On Wanderer... or someplace else?

He tried to turn to the side but was unable to. He suddenly had the feeling that the walls of the chamber were pulling together to crush him. Sweat slid down his forehead and he began to scream. That relieved him.

The screaming had given him an idea. No matter where he might have landed, the helmet of his spacesuit contained a functioning radio and if he were only to speak loud enough, he would probably be heard over a

loudspeaker aboard the Drusus. He knew that the radio had been turned on when he concentrated on his spring: he remembered that he had heard the faint but high-pitched hum of the small device. He forced himself to stillness and listened. At first he was quite certain that he could still hear the transmitter humming: it was a noise one took for granted and ignored as soon as the helmet of a spacesuit had been closed. But then he grew uncertain. He held his breath, hoping not to be disturbed by the sound of his own breathing but then he could hear the pulse of blood in his ears. He relaxed as much as he could in the narrow confines and listened further. And after two minutes he knew that his radio no longer worked. The humming had died; something must have happened to the small mechanism when he materialized in this space.

In any event, he had no more contact with the outer world. He could not even raise his arm to press the switch on his helmet that activated the distress signal transmitter.

• • •

In the control room of the Drusus the tense waiting slowly turned into painful nervousness. Ras Tschubai had been instructed to return as soon as he had made the spring. Now 30 minutes had gone by since he had last been seen in the control room and neither had he returned nor were there any clues as to where he was.

No one spoke. Each man was occupied with his own thoughts. What had happened to the African? Had he reached his goal? Why didn't he come back? Had he materialized someplace from which there was no return? Had he made a one-way leap into the instability zone and now could not get back out?

There was no one on board the Drusus who could have said exactly or even given a few ideas as to what might have happened to Ras Tschubai. There was nothing to do but wait.

It was 06:00 hours on the morning of April 24, 2042. Now there were only 186 hours remaining until the end of immortality.

• • •

After long and grating seconds of panic, Ras Tschubai's cool rationality had returned. He began to take an interest in his surroundings and look for a way to get out of what could be his tomb. For the first time he realized that there must be an opening in the small chamber, at about the level of his head, for there was a slight bit of light coming through there. Up until now he had not wondered how he could see at all. The weak light was enough for him to see that the walls of the 'coffin' were made of metal-plastic. Moreover, it was that blue type of metal-plastic whose molecular structure contained so many metallic atoms that the material became an excellent conductor. Ras Tschubai then tried to bring to mind all devices that for whatever reason made use of blue metal-plastic. While he was occupied with that, it occurred to him that Ferroplastite, as it was named, was an Earthly product manufactured with the help of Arkonide knowledge. He asked himself how probable it would be that Earthly ferroplastite would be in use on Wanderer and the conclusion came to him rather quickly that he was not on Wanderer at all but that after the explosion of the yellow light he had been thrown back on board the Drusus again.

That eased his mind for the moment. Relieved, he began to sort through his memories, trying to find out where on board the Drusus a device such as the one he was in would be found. Now that his eyes had completely adjusted to the darkness, he saw the grooves running across the top at regular intervals and when he turned his head as far as he could, he could follow the grooves down the walls, as well. The pattern of the grooves awakened a dim memory within him—a memory of something he had been shown a long time before because every mutant was to have some knowledge of the technical aspects of the spaceships in which he would be living. The grooves, he realized, fulfilled a very definite purpose: they divided the space into small chambers called vacuum-resonators, which served to absorb the shockwaves of a collapsing hyperfield and then allowed them to exhaust their energy by continuously reflecting them back and forth among the borders of the individual resonators.

The realization struck Ras Tschubai like a heavy blow: he had materialized inside a structural compensator—that device built to absorb the energy shock accompanying a transition and thus prevent any detection by

hostile forces of the hypertransiting ship. He lay in one of the resonator chambers—in which thousands of kilowatt-hours worth of energy spent themselves when the Drusus prepared for transition or returned into normal space.

All it would take for Ras Tschubai's life to become worth less than the life of a man hit by lightning 100 times in rapid succession—would be for someone to get the idea of setting the Drusus into transition.

He cringed, and groaned with pain. He all but lost his reason in the face of fear. He knew he could do nothing to save himself. A residual 5th dimensional force field enveloped the compensator even when it was inactive and for Ras Tschubai's paramechanical talents 5th dimensional fields were impenetrable barriers.

• • •

Perry Rhodan pursued an idea. He knew one of the few theorems governing paramechanics that were beyond question: teleportation leaps and telekinetic movements could not reach any goals that lay in a higher dimension than the one from which the attempts were being made. Or in other words; a teleporter in normal space could not reach a destination in 5th dimensional space. Ras Tschubai himself had found that out decades before on Ferrol when he had attempted to spring into the time vault. He had been knocked back.

Did the theorem of the unattainability of higher dimensional space contain the answer to the riddle connected with Ras Tschubai's disappearance? Had Wanderer slipped back into hyperspace and the Afrikaner could not reach it?

The question could be laid to rest immediately. If Wanderer were to be found in hyperspace, Ras Tschubai would have instantly returned to the place from which he had sprung. Besides, the emanations from Wanderer in such a case would not resemble the ones currently being continuously registered by the structural sensor station. So the solution to the problem was not all that simple.

On the other hand, if Wanderer were in normal space, then Ras Tschubai would have reached it without difficulty and returned a long time ago. Not to mention the fact that the sensor equipment would have long since detected the artificial planet.

What then? Perry Rhodan remembered Sgt. Sullivan's description: '...Only it looks like there is something in the area that would like to enter hyperspace but can't decide one way or the other...' Could any ideas be gleaned from that? Was there a continuum between normal space and hyperspace that would account for the peculiar reaction of the warp sensors and for Ras Tschubai's disappearance?

The thought seemed fantastic. Imagining 4½ or 4.3 dimensions was impossible and it was almost ridiculous to believe that the order of dimensions ran in anything but whole numbers with which the dimensionality of a given universe could be labeled. But fantastic and ridiculous or not, Rhodan decided, there were people on board this ship who could rack their brains with the help of a positronicon over the problem. He then gave the appropriate instructions and watched as the expression of the mathematician with whom he spoke became a grimace. The idea of a fourth-and-a-half dimension seemed to give the scholar a headache yet it also seemed to inspire him to nevertheless bring all his mathematical knowledge to bear on the question and work out a rational answer.

Afterwards, Rhodan felt relieved. The idea no longer seemed as unthinkable or offbeat as before. He considered the matter of what else could be done to solve the riddle of Wanderer. If Wanderer existed in an in-between dimension, what would happen if the Drusus went through it during a transition? The question could not be unequivocally answered. Evident was only that the ship would pass through Wanderer's present location safely if the artificial world lay either fully in normal space or in hyperspace. And Rhodan suspected that even something between two undangerous poles would not be dangerous. In any event, he decided not to run any risks and ordered the energy stations to supply the defense fields with as much power as possible. In addition, the control room was made aware of the fact that the possibility of being spotted, due to the disturbance in the structure of space during a transition, was just as great in this sector as anywhere else.

Then the structural compensators were readied to capture the energy shock of transition and to absorb it.

• • •

Ras Tschubai worked while in a kind of trance. The fear was still present but it no longer confused his reason. It gave him the strength to do things he never could have accomplished under normal circumstances. He expected every second the deadly flood of energy which he knew would gush down the same tube which allowed the weak light to enter.

There was only one small hope for Ras Tschubai to make his presence known and to save his life: he had to move either his right or his left arm far enough that he could activate the emergency switch on his helmet radio located just above his left ear.

When Ras Tschubai had come to after his ill-fated jump, he had lain in the chamber like a corpse in a coffin: on his back with his arms pressed to his sides. Without exerting himself, he could raise his arms only 10 centimeters: then his hand touched the upper surface of the chamber. However, it was impossible to bring his hand up to his helmet. He had tried to turn over but had not succeeded. His body was twice as wide as the vertical space in the chamber. He had drawn his right hand carefully over his body and had reached as far as his belt buckle. He was not able to move it any farther because then his right elbow was cramped by the sidewall.

Nevertheless it seemed to be the only move he could make at all. He let out his breath and waited until the air conditioner had absorbed it and his suit had adjusted to the now flatter form of his body. He clutched the upper edge of the hard plastic belt buckle with his hand. Sweat ran down into his eyes before it could be absorbed, as pain stabbed through his elbow. Even so, he left the hand where it was as he took another breath. The pain in his elbow increased and his lungs did not have the room they needed for breathing.

A thought came to Ras Tschubai: if he broke his elbow or the bones in his upper arm, would he still be able to move his hand? He held his breath as long as he could, letting his lungs soak up oxygen, then breathed out and waited impatiently until his spacesuit had reacted and shrunk to fit his body.

Then he pushed his hand farther. He was now completely drenched in sweat and the high-pitched humming of the air conditioner, which could not handle such an abnormal quantity of fluid all at once, irritated him like the noise of a swarm of wasps. Not everyone would be able to consciously and deliberately break his own arm but Ras Tschubai knew that he had no other choice.

The pain in his joint made him almost unconscious but he blacked out only when the elbow gave with a light crack and a wave of unbearable pain seared its way up his arm.

The knowledge of the desperate situation he was in called his senses back quickly. He opened his eyes and found himself in a world whose contours constantly shimmered through a thick red cloud. It almost made him sick but he saw that he could still move his right hand even though he could feel nothing but a gnawing pain in his whole arm. His fingers could no longer feel what they grasped.

He pushed his hand along his body by centimeters. Now it touched the magnetic seal of his breast pocket... reached his left shoulder... finally came to his neck. It was amazing in what abnormal directions a hand could move when the arm was broken.

Ras felt triumphant when he heard the scratching noise that meant his fingers had reached his helmet. That helped him keep from getting sick. He pushed his hand farther, giving himself a little more time now that the worst was over. He did not want to run the risk of some too quick and uncareful movement making him unconscious again.

Then he heard a noise above him. It began with a deep humming, grew higher and finally faded out of hearing range with a shrill whistling tone. Blackness closed in on Ras Tschubai again.

Someone had turned on the Compensator.

The African had not come back yet. It was 08:30 hours on the morning of April 24, 2042. Atlan the Arkonide had joined the team of mathematicians and was helping with the search for the solution to the riddle.

The Drusus was ready to spring. The data for a short leap across a few light-minutes had been received in the control room and programmed into

the automatic guidance system. The protective screens had been so increased in power that as far as anyone could tell not even a collision with Wanderer itself in that space-between-space would cause any damage. The structural compensators were running and ready to absorb the double shock and prevent the spreading of shockwaves.

Rhodan prepared to give the order for starting.

The transition alert had been sounded. The crewmen sat at their posts, in front of their instruments, and at the defense stations, waiting for the brief shock of dematerialization.

Nothing more was needed to trigger the jump than for Perry Rhodan to press the red-lit release button. That would set the complicated mechanism of the electronic regulation system into motion and transmit thousands of swift impulses to the different guidance systems.

Rhodan had already laid his hand on the switch when a shrill and overwrought voice screamed out of the loudspeaker: "No! Don't spring! Don't spring! Shut off the compensators—I'm trapped in one of them! Help!"

Rhodan pulled his hand back as though he had touched a piece of red-hot iron. He looked up at the loudspeaker in disbelief. The person who had cried for help had not given his name and his voice had been so distorted that it could not be recognized. But there was only one individual unaccounted for at the moment: Ras Tschubai.

Ras Tschubai was trapped in a structural compensator! Rhodan rescinded the order for hytrans and from his seat shut down the compensator installation.

2/ A PHANTOM FOREVER?

The compensator had been taken apart and the unconscious African had been found inside. His arm had been oddly twisted and was apparently broken. It was clear why he had not been able to use his paramechanical ability to escape from his unusual prison: the residual fields had prevented it with their 5th dimensional structure.

According to the doctors, Ras Tschubai had also suffered a nervous shock. It was not surprising, considering what he had gone through, but unfortunately he could not be questioned because of it. Dr. Sköldson, head of the Medical Department, refused to allow questioning for a period of at least four days. "The man needs rest, more rest and still more rest," Sköldson, maintained.

Perry Rhodan acquiesced. The team of mathematicians was informed of the new development and although Rhodan had at first assumed that Ras Tschubai's strange adventure certainly had nothing to do with the calculations, Atlan's first surprised and then joyous expression showed Rhodan that the mutant had provided an important clue.

"This is fantastic in the truest sense of the word, Administrator," Atlan exclaimed with eyes aglow. "A man in the structural compensator will help our mathematics on its way!"

Perry Rhodan looked at him earnestly. "I just wish, Admiral, you would finally tell me where your math is going! Have you at least found out something by now?"

The Arkonide smiled. "Of course, my friend. But I'd rather not raise your hopes unnecessarily. I'll come back at 11:30 hours and let you know about our initial results. You'll be surprised: we've run up against a very strange phenomenon."

The expansion of the range of physics from 3 dimensions to the 4 dimensional space-time continuum had set off a revolution in natural science. The next expansion, the glimpse of 5th dimensional hyperspace, had been bestowed on man by the lucky chance of encountering the Arkonides. The discovery of a no-man's land between the dimensions, however, which had been brought about by Wanderer's disappearance, was a sensation because of the mere fact that no one had even suspected a 'semispace,' as Atlan called it, could exist between the dimensions.

"You're enough of a scientist yourself, Administrator," said Atlan in commencing his explanation, "to understand that I am unable to give you any graphic description. The Einstein Continuum is unimaginable to begin with and hyperspace is even less easy to visualize. So how could the intersection of the two, semispace, be anything else?"

"Let's make a model. Imagine hyperspace as something mounted on a 5th dimensional system of coordinates. We rotate this model and we see that ½ of the 5th dimensional sphere created by this movement has demonstrated a very peculiar property: it distorts the axes within it. It shortens them, and of course the amount of shortening is determined by the speed of rotation. Going into the distorting hemisphere the axes still have their original length but then, they begin to shorten. By the time they reach the halfway point, they have completely disappeared. Then they begin to grow again and in the moment they leave the distorting hemisphere, they have attained their original length once again. Since a hemisphere is involved and the framework of hyperspace consists of five axes, two or three of the axes are involved in the distortion at any given moment: never fewer and never more. The important thing now is to find out in which direction the rotation of the coordinate framework occurs, which unfortunately is something we have no idea how to accomplish!

"At the moment, we know one thing for sure, since Wanderer is at no time visible but on the other hand is not completely within hyperspace, judging from the signals which the structural sensor continually receives, the 5th axis and the j-axis must be in a state of constant distortion without ever reaching its full length and yet without ever disappearing entirely. If it were ever to reach full length, Wanderer would be entirely in hyperspace and the sensor would pick up no more signals. If the axis disappeared completely, Wanderer would instantly appear on the vidscreens, for disappearance of the j-axis means return to the Einstein universe.

"That, then, is the situation in which Wanderer finds itself. Naturally, the state is relatively unstable. A tiny bit more one way or the other would be enough to make the semispace effect disappear. Whether Wanderer would then sink into hyperspace or reemerge into Einstein Space we can't say yet. That would probably depend on the sort of push given to it."

Perry Rhodan and a number of his officers had listened to the explanation attentively. Rhodan looked up and saw on the men's faces how much discomfort the description had caused. He tried to identify the feeling, which he felt himself, and could explain it in no other way than the reaction of a man who had expected a revelation and had gotten something less.

The picture was too blurry. Even the model was inconceivable for the most part. No one could tell what he should do with it. It was like an assignment to add meters and kilowatt-hours—impossible to do, useless and confusing.

Atlan the Arkonide seemed to understand his thoughts. He was quite earnest as he said: "I'm sorry that I disappointed you. But what can you expect from mathematicians? They give you a collection of formulas but no ideas of what to do. What can be done with the formulas is no longer our problem: the technicians can worry about them. All we can do is give you further and more complete information. Everything else is up to you."

The officers had turned and gone back to their places as they realized the discussion was becoming a private one.

Atlan stood up and offered Rhodan his hand. "I'd like you to be aware of one thing," he said quietly. "I'll work as fast as I can. I'm even ready to have an injection given to me so that I can, go for a few days without sleep. I want to help you, no matter what the circumstances. Because I'm your friend."

Perry Rhodan took Atlan's hand without a word and shook it. Atlan turned and went out, Rhodan watching him go. He knew what worries troubled the Arkonide. Atlan had acquired a cell-activator from It , the lord of Wanderer, 10,000 years before and was independent of having to make regular visits to the Physiotron. So Atlan did not have to have a cell-renewal by May 1st. But he had recognized how natural it would be for someone to harbor a very definite suspicion against him: that he deliberately delayed the solution of the riddle in order to take Rhodan's place once time ran out and reduced the Administrator to a tottering old man.

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Atlan's earnest assurance was the excuse for Perry Rhodan to come to grips for the first time with the thought that had been running around in his mind for weeks. He had always pushed it aside for there were enough other things to think about... or was it because he was afraid of it?

Was he right in chasing after the phantom of immortality for weeks, or even months, at a time when, if he ever reached it, it would be available only to himself and a few of his friends and colleagues? Was he right in exposing men and ships to danger while searching for Wanderer? Would it not be more reasonable to follow the age-old pattern that had been in effect in Terran history from the beginning: the succession of generations and the replacement of the old by the young? Could he not find a successor for himself, retire and live his life to its end like a normal man? He was now 106 years old. More than half of that time-span he had stood at the apex of Earthly mankind and had created the Solar Imperium and made Terra a power to be reckoned with in galactic politics. Was that not a work that he could be proud of and content with?

He suddenly felt that he had up to now taken too little time to evaluate himself. How much was he himself tied up with the rise of the Solar Imperium? To what extent had his own, person and Terra become identical and how much did those elsewhere identify him with the billions of Terrans who trusted him with leadership? What effect would it have if he now stepped back, gave his place over to someone else and died in a few days?

He remembered It , the incomprehensible being on Wanderer. It had given him immortality almost with an absentminded wave of its non-existent hand, as though giving a not very valuable present away. It had said that It was giving the Terrans the same chance It had given the Arkonides 20,000 years before—the chance to conquer the Galaxy, plunge into the Universe and create a powerful and enduring realm. Should one not grant It a better grasp of the universe and admit that It would not have made such a present if it had not been necessary at all?

What would happen, Rhodan wondered, if he abdicated? The continuity of the development would be disturbed. Without any exaggerated pride, he could say that at the moment none of the men under him would be able to hold the reins of the Solar Imperium as tightly as was needed. A split would result and the Solar Imperium would splinter—becoming defenseless booty for anyone who cared to take it. And they were legion.

He thought also of the crew of the Drusus. Had there ever been even the slightest indication that anyone aboard doubted the worth of the risks

involved in the search for Wanderer? Had Lt. Tompetch or Capt. Gorlat complained about their dangerous mission on Solitude?

No!

Everyone was convinced that Rhodan was doing the right thing. All knew that the Earth needed him more than ever before and all were ready to give their last to enable him to reach Wanderer. Not because he was a nice guy or whatever but because they felt responsible to the Earth.

And he had been foolish enough to wonder if he should not retire and turn his mission over to someone else!

• • •

After he had thus come to a decision, Rhodan began to consider how he might learn more about the secret of Wanderer even before the mathematicians were finished with their intricate calculations.

The automatic calendar showed 21:14 hours on April 24, 2042. The remaining time had shrunk to 171 hours.

Perry Rhodan remembered that just before he had concentrated on working out whether he should retire or not, he'd had a brief and quickly disappearing idea. He tried to call the idea back into his mind and finally it occurred to him again—

The intelligence from Solitude! The being from Solitude, the world on the alien time-plane, the being was capable of separating its spirit from its body. Though intelligent, the creature had been described by Reginald Bell as looking like a sea cow.

He wondered why he had not thought of this before. The alien being, whom Bell had given the name 'Nathan', was on board the Drusus. It had chosen to leave its home world and not return until the specter of the Druufs had gone. The Druufs divided the Solitudians into six parts, rendering them immobile though still living, put them into boxes and used them as organic warning devices at outlying bases.

If anyone at all were able to reach Wanderer from here, it would be Nathan. Not bodily but with the help of its astral form, which not only

could separate from its body but lead a most independent existence.

Perry Rhodan armed himself with a telepathic augmenter and made his way to the suite of cabins Nathan had been assigned.

As Rhodan entered, Nathan rolled about, splashing in the shallow pool to which the largest of his cabins had been transformed.

Nathan interrupted his pastime immediately. He, or rather his body, was really only a grey cylinder of considerable size. There were no limbs, arms or legs, no eyes, no mouth and nothing that could be expected to be found on the body of an intelligent living being. Nathan glided out of the container and onto a portion of the floor covered with a layer of soil and grass. He stopped in front of Rhodan.

Rhodan crouched in the grass, set the augmenter down in front of him and put the augmenter's metal headpiece on and around his head. Then he said: "Hello, friend! I've come to ask for your help."

Nathan understood quickly. Behind closed eyes, Rhodan saw an image appear that said: "Speak, my friend. I shall be glad to help you."

With that Rhodan began to detail his plan to Nathan.

Nathan had not yet spent very many hours aboard the ship and had stayed entirely in his cabin. He felt affection for the strange being who had called him friend and had saved him from the Druuf.

However, Nathan was secretly afraid of the spaceship. His fear had grown so strong that it hurt. Nathan's race was one that knew nothing of technology. When Nathan's people wanted to move, they did so under the power of their own bodies, or if personal presence was not required, they sent their spirits out. They were a modest and unassuming race but a vital one; they saw their purpose in life as being able to think and play with the power of their thoughts. Nathan had never before seen anything as large as this spaceship. His fear led him to regard it as an enemy. Yet his reason told him that the ship was not a living thing and thus could be neither friendly nor hostile and that it would only take a little time for him to get used to his new surroundings.

His friend the alien had asked him to come to the large chamber he called the control room. A number of other aliens were there, wanting to

watch Nathan separate body and mind. His friend had told him that he was to try to reach a world floating invisible in space somewhere near the ship. The invisible world was no concern of Nathan's. Why should he try to find and reach it? But the alien was his friend and the request of a friend could not be denied.

The large hatch doors opened as Nathan arrived at the control room. He saw his friend waving to him from the other end of the large chamber. He also saw quite a few other aliens standing in a circle around his friend.

Nathan moved into the center of the room and stopped. He had already discussed everything necessary with his friend and there was nothing more to be said. Nathan relaxed his powerful body and began to disconnect his spirit from its material envelope.

He felt nothing himself during the process. After all, it was his spirit that felt, sensed and thought, and he was his spirit. His body took part in nothing more than purely physical and chemical processes. Nathan knew that, even if he did not know the words 'physical' or 'chemical'. He left his body behind and floated above it. He knew—having observed his fellows do the same thing so many times before—that now he appeared as a barely visible, shapeless and cloud-like image. He concentrated on his friend and attempted to copy his shape with his mimicking ability. It was small at first, about a foot high, and because of the effect of compression, clearly visible. Then he grew, becoming more transparent. He looked around and discovered surprise on the faces of the other aliens as he formed a head that resembled that of his friend. He of course did not have the time to imitate every feature exactly but the effect was unmistakable.

Then he set off on his way to that invisible world floating somewhere out in the blackness of space.

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"It's one of the oddest life-forms I've ever seen!" someone said when Nathan had left, leaving behind only his huge body which lay still on the control room floor.

"It isn't quite as odd as on first thought," Rhodan answered. "The strange part is definitely the ability of separating the spirit from the body. But that which so strikingly reminds us of our childhood fear of ghosts surely has a quite natural explanation."

The others looked at him expectantly.

"Of course," Rhodan continued, "the astral form is immaterial. That which looks like a cloud to you is not at all a gas, in case you thought so. The astral form itself is nothing more than a field whose nature we know nothing about. It is, in any case, a field with inherent intelligence. What we see is the effect this field has on its surroundings. It seems to give off energy that affects the refractive index of the air around it. In that way it becomes visible to our eyes: the area where the refractive index has been altered appears to us as a cloud."

"The oddest aspect of it all, however, is the field's ability to reflect nearby objects, even to the point of mimicking them exactly. You have seen how Nathan took on my form and tried to copy my face. I am convinced that he would develop his talent into a perfect skill if he ever took enough time with it. Please don't ask how shocked the Arkonide and I were when we first saw a spirit-form on Solitude!"

The men were silent. The explanation had been illuminating but the phenomenon was still impossible to grasp. They all looked to where they suspected Nathan's spirit to be—out in the darkness of space where there was nothing whose refractive index Nathan could affect and become visible.

Nathan was in open space for the first time in his life but he felt nothing out of the ordinary. At first he had been somewhat curious but he had lost his interest once he had seen that there was nothing unusual involved. He moved in the direction that had been pointed out to him and waited for something to appear that he could investigate.

He did not know the speed at which he was traveling. He hurried, however, and after he had been underway for some time, he sensed a sort of suction take hold of him and pull him forward. He was surprised: never before in his experience in the astral form had he felt any physical influences. After all, his astral form was composed of nothing that could be

sucked up or blown away. His curiosity awoke again and at the same time he felt a little afraid of whatever it was somewhere ahead that drew him closer and yet remained invisible.

He suddenly wished he were back on board the ship that had disappeared somewhere behind him and looked no different from the many stars quietly shining through the dark background in all directions.

But even if he had wanted to, he would not have been able to return. The attractive force was more powerful than his strength. He gave up his resistance and allowed himself to be drawn further.

After some more time had passed he saw something come into view far ahead. It looked like a bright spot with no shape. Nathan saw that it was to this spot that he was being drawn. He watched as the point of light grew larger. Finally it had increased enough to have a shape and looked like a huge hemisphere. Nathan approached with fearful speed and a few moments later the hemisphere had grown so large that he could no longer see all of it at once. Now he saw beneath him broad planes that were evidently covered with grass, vast forests, rivers, lakes and oceans. He saw a collection of regularly formed shapes that seemed artificial and probably made up something his friend had called a 'city'. He also saw clouds floating slowly along below him but all that was as though viewed through a haze. The view was not completely open. There was something between him and the land below.

He saw it at the last moment but then it was too late to react. A transparent wall suddenly hurtled towards him—the wall he had taken for a layer of haze. He felt a strong jolt as he hit it—and then felt as though he were sinking into something soft. He was terribly confused by it all. For a few seconds he had the sensation of being held captive by something. But then the suction stopped and he was free again. Nathan looked up and saw immediately above him the shimmering barrier he had just penetrated. He did not know what it was made of but since it no longer affected him he lost all interest in it. He made his way downwards.

When he had covered half the distance toward the surface he suddenly sensed a distant feeling of amusement. He puzzled about it until it became clear to him that he was not the one being amused but rather that there was someone else transmitting his merriment by telepathic means. Nathan heard

the shrill cries resembling the ones he and his fellows typically gave out when they were excessively pleased about something; and confused, he tried to understand how one of his race could have reached this peculiar world. Then his reason was in gear and he realized that merriment transmitted by telepathy must always sound to him like a shrill cry, no matter how the noise originally sounded. Nathan was the only one of his kind on this planet but there was someone here who was very happy about something and was communicating it with him.

Nathan waited expectantly for what had yet to come while proceeding slowly towards the ground. Suddenly he heard a rumbling voice.

"My poor friend," it called to him, "what did you come here for? Don't you know you can't go back? You've left your body behind and will never see it again!"

Nathan was terrified—not so much at the prospect of having to remain a ghost forever, which he could not quite believe, but rather at the fact the stranger knew him.

"How do you know that?" he asked timidly.

"Didn't you notice the attraction field that drew you here, poor friend?"

Nathan's mind could do little with the term 'attraction field' but he understood what was meant. "Yes, of course," he thought. "What about it?"

"Couldn't you defend yourself against it?"

"No, it was too strong."

"You see! How are you ever going to get out of here again? You would have to overcome that field to return to your ship. And you can't."

"That may be," Nathan thought, "but not so important at the moment. My friend will come pick me up when it's time... Who are you, anyway?"

"I am the master of this world. I have no name."

"Couldn't you turn that attraction field off?"

"No, I cannot. There is much that I can do but that field lies outside my power. You must remain here, my poor friend."

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When Nathan—or his astral form—had not yet returned by 13:00 hours on April 25, Perry Rhodan could only swallow his anger and go on. Inspired by the experience with Ras Tschubai, he had the structocomps searched to see if any cloud-like nebulosity had been caught in one of the resonator chambers. But the compensators were empty. Nathan had suffered a different fate than the African, it seemed.

The time remaining had now shrunk to 150 hours and when one considered how little success had been obtained in the preceding 35 hours since the Drusus had finished its last transition, there was little reason to be optimistic. The team of mathematicians had been working almost without interruption but the results so far were only partial and even these were so incomplete that out of them no recognizable overview of the entire situation could be reached.

Towards 19:00 hours, after another six hours had passed without result, Atlan requested a further conference with Perry Rhodan. As he entered the control room he carried with him a rather thick folder whose contents turned out to be a collection of diagrams and pages of mathematical formulae.

"Have you cracked the mystery?" Rhodan asked after he had greeted the Arkonide.

Atlan smiled, though it seemed a little forced. "It could be," he answered cautiously. "At least we can draw from this a number of useful deductions."

He sat down and placed the folder in front of him. Rhodan watched him attentively. He mentally calculated that the Arkonide had not slept in more than 48 hours. That was no problem for the drugs stocked by the medical station but Rhodan knew about Atlan's ingrained caution towards pills and injections. The Arkonide's eyes, redder than usual, showed that as yet he had taken nothing.

"Let's get started!" said Rhodan more harshly than he intended.

Atlan pulled a sheet of paper out of the folder and laid it on the table. Meanwhile the officers present in the control room had grouped themselves

around Rhodan and the Arkonide in order to hear every word. Atlan pointed to the sheet, which was covered with confocal ellipsis. A series of numbers and formulae stood by each elliptic orbit.

"This," the Arkonide began, "is the structure of that part of space in which Wanderer is embedded. In other words, that part of space affected by the distortion of the coordinate axis. semispace is the name we've given to it. Wanderer's center of gravity coincides with one of the two focal points of all these ellipsis. So Wanderer with its entire circumference lies about like this." With his free hand he drew a figure representing a circle on the sheet. The circle intersected every ellipsis except for the outermost. "This entire system rotates. The picture here," and he tapped on the paper, "must be regarded as a stop-motion view of the scene. It shows, or rather the ellipsis show, how great an effect the shortening of the axis has on certain portions of space. The number of elliptical orbits shows the shortening factor: it's greatest inside and decreases towards the outside. These values change during the rotation, however, and in our view what this leads to is a most noteworthy phenomenon. As you can see, the META stability zone is not much larger than Wanderer itself. On every fourth rotation, a part of the planet's surface leaves the META stability zone completely. It appears then in normal space but remains invisible to us because this event takes place on the side of Wanderer turned away from us. The rest of the planet, still captive in semispace, has the effect of a screen and prevents us from registering any radiation. How long the appearance lasts is unknown to us: we do know that it is no less than 10 seconds and no more than 500 seconds. Just as unknown to us for the time being is how large a portion of the planet surface leaves the zone of META stability. However," he said, smiling, "I think it would be large enough to accommodate the landing of a Gazelle."

"When will this phenomenon take place again?" Rhodan wanted to know.

"Unfortunately," Atlan answered, "it last appeared a few minutes ago." He looked at the clock. "25 minutes ago, to be exact. At least we've calculated the speed of rotation: 3.6 hours. Since the effect shows up only on every fourth revolution, we'll have to wait about 14 more hours for the next appearance."

Rhodan leaped up. "That's nothing in comparison to how long we've been waiting in vain," he said, spirits rising. "If we can land a Gazelle on Wanderer, we've as good as won."

Atlan looked at him mockingly. "Sit back down, Administrator," he said. "There's more."

Rhodan became attentive. "Still more?"

"Yes. It concerns Nathan."

Rhodan sat down.

Atlan began again. "According to our understanding of it, Nathan's astral form can be considered to be a mixture of 4th and 5th dimensional fields. Our calculations have shown that there are influences between such an entity and semispace. For Nathan, semispace is a pole that attracts him to it. So he can reach Wanderer easily enough; he just can't get back. He's a prisoner there. That's why he hasn't returned yet."

Perry Rhodan looked thoughtfully at the grey cylinder lying on the floor in the middle of the room. "That means then," he murmured, "that we'll have to take his body to him."

"Exactly," Atlan agreed. "And there's still more."

Rhodan looked up in surprise.

"Don't be afraid, barbarian," Atlan grinned. "This is the last thing; we haven't found out anything more. Remember Ras Tschubai? A powerful force threw him back and knocked him into the structural compensator. Was it by chance? Could he have just as easily turned up in a supply cupboard? No, he couldn't have. The force that threw him back could only send him on a certain path and that path ended in the compensator. Why? Because the compensator maintains a residual 5th dimensional field even during its inactive phase. For a force operating out of semispace, that residual field is the only gate into normal space. Imagine a wall around semispace: the only hole through which Ras Tschubai could be sent was the residual field in the compensator."

He had believed that he would have to explain to Rhodan the consequences of this bit of knowledge but hardly had he finished when Rhodan leaped up again. This time the Administrator did not do so out of

relief but because a thought had occurred to him—exactly that thought which Atlan had intended to lead him to.

"A hole in the wall!" Rhodan exclaimed. "That was what we were trying to create when we sent Rous through the mirror field. We failed with that—because the mirror field has a different structure than semispace, right?"

"Exactly," said Atlan.

"So we were on a false trail. Now we know that the compensator's residual field is such a 'hole in the wall'. We can't use the compensator itself to transport us to Wanderer because the compensator doesn't have the power to move us. But we possess another device that operates with the same effect as the compensator and we can do it with that. Is that your opinion, too, Admiral?"

Atlan nodded. His eyes were luminous and now showed no signs of fatigue.

"Then it's the teletransmitter," Perry Rhodan murmured, having suddenly grown thoughtful. "I'm surprised we didn't think of it before. I wonder why?"

A feeling of unbounded joy grew in him.

Now they knew how they were to reach Wanderer.

3/ MYSTERIOUS ISLAND

To Perry Rhodan it seemed like a sort of irony of fate that it would be none other than the device that It had created on Wanderer many millennia before which now would provide access to Wanderer and It. The effect of the teletransmitter could be best described with the illustration Atlan had already used: the field of the transmitter bored a hole through the wall that marked the border between 4th and 5th dimensions. Normally the area of the 5th dimensional continuum which could be crossed with the help of the teletransmitter was pictured in one's mind as a sphere. The transmitter made its way through it, boring a hole first on the near side and then on the far. The latter led back into normal space. Here the situation was different: since semispace was nothing more than a rudimentary 5th dimension, only one hole was needed in this case.

That meant that circuits in the transmitter would have to be altered. Atlan, who was in charge of the mathematical aspect, explained: "We have to find out which of the thousands of possible settings for the machine is the right one. That will be a difficult task. Mathematics won't help us a great deal with it... unless we wait until the calculations are finished and we don't have the time for that. We'll just have to experiment."

The teletransmitter, which at one time had given valuable service to Perry Rhodan as a weapon superior to all others, was built securely into the ship. The beginning of the transporter beam where the object to be displaced had to be positioned so that it could be subject to the 5th dimensional force, could be adjusted at will. For the sake of convenience, Rhodan had the unit installed in the control room so that the necessary tests could be carried out there. Rhodan began the series of experiments with a number of small lumps of metal, placing them where the transmitter affected them. At the same time, an adjustment had been made on the machine's controls so that the transmitter would no longer function in the usual manner. The second hole in the wall, leading out again of the 5th dimension, had been stopped up, so to speak. When one of the test objects disappeared it could only mean that it had been transported to Wanderer.

The experiments began, although they were not very promising. When Rhodan, sitting at his place, switched on the transmitter for the first time the lump of metal began to change shape. An invisible force mashed it flat against the control room floor. The sides of the original cube had been about two centimeters long, now it had become a kind of pancake almost a meter square. Rhodan turned the transmitter off at that point.

A small detail of the machine's setting was changed, then the second attempt was undertaken. It failed just like the first. Despite yet another adjustment, the third attempt did not achieve the desired result either.

Atlan, following Rhodan's emphatic request to get some sleep, had retired. He had asked, however, that he be awakened as soon as any successes had been achieved.

Midnight passed and the date shifted to April 26. The time remaining to Rhodan was now only a little more than 140 hours.

Then, towards 03:00 hours in the morning, an attempt finally succeeded! Instead of flattening out, as had happened to its predecessors, the small piece of metal simply vanished completely from the control room floor.

At last an attempt to reach Wanderer by means of the available equipment and resources had succeeded.

Atlan was awakened. He had slept only five hours but that had been enough to make him completely fresh and full of energy. He had another piece of metal disappear for him, then made a suggestion. "We don't know yet what role the size of the object plays in the transmission. It could be that a man or even a Gazelle would be smashed flat just like the first dozen pieces of metal. We should try to send a robot to Wanderer first."

Perry Rhodan agreed. One of the battle-robots aboard was ordered up to the control room. The robot was a monster weighing several tons; it was equipped with weapons built into its arms that could replace the firepower of an entire company. Its design followed the Arkonide pattern but it had been built on Earth. The powerful automaton stepped without objection to the place where Perry Rhodan had indicated. Then Rhodan informed it of its mission.

Undisturbed, the robot answered. "Yes sir. I am at your disposal."

Rhodan stepped backwards to his control panel, not letting the robot out of his sight. With glowing eyes, the robot looked straight ahead.

Perry Rhodan slowly counted down: "...4... 3... 2... 1... now!"

The knob clicked lightly on the control panel but only Rhodan heard it. The sound was swallowed up for the others by the high-pitched noise emanating from the robot, the sound of rending metal. The men watched with terror in their wide eyes as the mighty robot changed. The robot took a short, wavering step forward as something took hold of its metal shoulders and ripped them apart. The chest seemed to rip and tear while the metal groaned and screamed, twisted into unnatural shapes. The robot started to defend itself but too few of its bodily functions were still intact for it to succeed. It fell to the ground and at the same moment the uncanny force that had flattened the small pieces of metal before was upon it. Within moments there was nothing left of the once powerful battle-robot but an

ugly grey pile of metal that was no longer able to move. The noise died away. Remaining in the room was only the stench of overheated wires and glowing half-conductors.

It had all taken place in two or three seconds. When Rhodan shut off the transmitter, the fate of Robot CQ-1238 was already sealed.

Rhodan looked over at Atlan.

Atlan caught the glance and raised his eyebrows. "I thought as much," he said simply. "The basic setting is right but an adjustment will have to be made for the size and weight of the object being transported. Evidently we'll have to recalculate our figures for each amount of mass we try to transmit. For that we'll have to run a series of experiments with a variety of objects of different sizes. That won't take so long because we can retain the basic setting."

Rhodan sighed and looked at the automatic calendar.

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In the depths of the vast hangar, Reginald Bell was busy getting a Gazelle-type space-scout ready to go: Reginald Bell, #2 man of the Solar Imperium. Bell had been one of the first to learn of the results of the mathematicians team. He had been assigned to land on that portion of Wanderer that appeared in normal space once every 14.4 hours. No one knew how much time it remained in normal space or how large it was.

Reginald Bell knew what kind of an assignment that was. He had taken it on himself because he too had been instructed to find Wanderer and enter the Physiotron. Bell had been the second man to take part in the cell renewal 62 years before. If he were not able to find Wanderer within the allotted time and receive the life-prolonging treatment, he would age into a more than 100-year-old man within hours and die after two days at most. That alone was reason enough for Reginald Bell to take on any assignment that contained within it the chance of reaching Wanderer one way or another. However, he had turned down the offer of a full crew for the Gazelle. Most of the small spaceboat's functions could be taken care of automatically. Bell was confident that he could accomplish his mission with

only the help of one companion, assuming the mission could be accomplished at all. He had asked Lt. Tompetch if he would come along and Tompetch had agreed with a happy grin as though he had no idea he had just obligated himself to a suicide mission. Bell had explained that to him and emphasized that he could decide to back out if he chose.

To that Tompetch had answered: "You know, I've been a second looey for far too long, at least in my estimation. If there's anything I can do to become a first lieutenant, I'll do it. Do you think that if we're successful I could get a promotion out of it?"

Reginald Bell had not missed Tompetch's characteristic wink while asking the question. Bell replied that a promotion was not at all involved and furthermore, if they were not successful, he would personally see to it that Tompetch was busted back down to corporal. Tompetch went along with it but winked again.

Bell had begun at midnight to prepare the Gazelle for its flight. Under normal conditions no preparations were necessary: the spaceboat pilot requested permission to take off, glided to the hangar airlock, waited until the hatches opened, and flew out. But here the situation was different. Extra equipment which could indicate the relative position of the Drusus to the Gazelle was necessary, as well as a timesaving electronic control system which cut the time for regulating controls from microseconds down to nanoseconds. In this situation the lives of the two men could depend on how quickly the controls could be adjusted. Finally, a pattern had to be made, containing what the robot Homunk had called Perry Rhodan's 'individual vibrations' 62 years before. The vibratory pattern, broadcast by a telepathic augmenter, would serve to open up the forcefield over Wanderer when the Gazelle prepared to land. Reginald Bell had at first believed that he could finish up all these preparations in three or at most four hours. But when 06:30 hours rolled around, Mike Tompetch had not been able even to get the vibratory pattern ready, and of all the things they were taking, that was the most important.

The mathematicians had calculated that the visibility phase of a part of Wanderer's surface would begin at 0857.34 hours. How long it would last, no one knew for sure. It was hoped that it would endure long enough to allow a Gazelle to land. But again, no one knew.

Tompetch brought the vibratory pattern shortly after 07:00 and it was installed in the telepathic augmenter. That took another ½ hour. Bell took no more time with it, not even to run a test. The pattern had to be perfect, else the Gazelle and its two occupants would go up in a gaseous cloud upon impact with the forcefield around Wanderer.

The Gazelle stood ready to go at 07:45. Bell reported the fact to the control room and received permission to take off along with Rhodan's last admonishment.

"Be careful, Reggie! You know that your safety margin could be only a matter of a few centimeters. If you aren't in the precise location, you won't even see Wanderer's surface, let alone be able to land on it. And even if you are in the right spot... you know you have only a few seconds time to penetrate the forcefield and land. If you succeed in landing, make your way immediately to the Physiotron. You have everything you need with you. Don't wait for me. We'll keep working with the teletransmitter. If we don't come up with anything in the next 15 hours, we'll come to Wanderer the same way you did. In any case, we'll get in touch with you as soon as we reach Wanderer. Is everything clear?"

"Perfectly."

"Then good luck, old pal!"

"Thanks, Perry, and... don't forget to come, too!"

"Right!"

The connection was broken. At 07:50 the Gazelle began to glide towards the inner hatch of the hangar lock. The hatch passageway was crossed within a few moments. At 07:54, the small discus-shaped spaceboat left the huge body of the Drusus and headed out into space at a moderate speed.

The game of chance had begun. No one knew how it would end. The time remaining was now only 136 hours.

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Gazelle G-203 floated motionless in space, motionless relative to the Drusus and to Wanderer. Reginald Bell had positioned the small spacecraft according to the figures given by the mathematicians. For lack of another system of reference, the position data had been given in the Intrinsic Ship's Coordinate System (ISCS), a system of coordinates whose focal point was the center of the Drusus. Planes were defined by the ship's three axis from which horizontal and vertical angles were determined. The third coordinate was the distance from the ship's center.

By 08:00, Bell had reached the calculated position with a few manoeuvres and corrections. From then on he sat back in his seat and stared at the vidscreen, now and then glancing at the sensor equipment, and occasionally spoke with Lt. Tompetch.

"How late is it now?" he asked at length.

"08:34, sir."

Bell figured it out in his head. Still 23 minutes and some seconds to go.

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"Here," said Atlan. "This is the transport value, a function of the transport mass. A constant, slightly variable function. It will be difficult for us to make any more mistakes."

Rhodan looked at the diagram and agreed with the Arkonide. The transport value for a mass of 100 tons was only 3½ times larger than that for a mass of 100 grams. That meant that for the teletransmitter only five different control settings would be enough to cover the range from 100 grams clear up to 100 tons. Robot CQ-1238 would have been saved by a setting only I step higher. Perry Rhodan made another attempt with a second robot. It succeeded perfectly: the robot disappeared from the control room and there was no doubt that it had appeared on Wanderer at the same moment.

That was shortly after 08:30. At 08:45, Rhodan tried again to radio Reginald Bell and Lt. Tompetch. There was no reply, since Gazelle G-023 was long since in the shadow of semispace by that time. Between normal space and semispace there could be no communication.

Perry Rhodan had a second Gazelle readied for takeoff and at the same time ordered the tele-transmitter's starting beam aimed at the outer hatch of the large hangar airlock. In this way difficult manoeuvres would be avoided. As soon as the Gazelle left the ship, it would enter the effective radius of the teletransmitter and be expedited to Wanderer. Rhodan set the controls himself, feeling uneasy as he did so. He missed the usual series of tests that would make sure of the safety of the undertaking. But finally he told himself that in the first place he could lose no more time and in the second place the transport value he had just programmed into the machine was the result of an exact calculation and so there could be no reason to worry.

It was 08:52 when he told himself that.

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Shortly after 08:57 the matter sensor sounded. The warning device began to hum and on the register screen, almost in the center, a tiny point lit up and began to grow as Bell watched.

Reginald Bell's hand moved over and he switched on the telepathic augmenter. With the help of the installed pattern, it would broadcast Perry Rhodan's individual vibrations. Even before he could make out their destination on the panorama screen, he set the Gazelle in motion so that the point of light on the sensor moved closer towards the center.

Tompetch suddenly yelled, "There, sir! Look!"

Reginald Bell raised his head and saw a splotch of pale brightness appear on the panorama screen. It lay, like the light spot on the sensor screen, almost exactly in the middle of the forward screen-half and visibly increased in size as though it approached the Gazelle at an unheard-of speed. Bell repressed the fear the unusual sight aroused in him and gunned the motors for a higher velocity. As though slammed by a giant fist, the Gazelle shot forward toward the indistinct light. While Bell trained his attention solely on the instruments, Lt. Tompetch watched the panorama screen. He saw the bright spot quickly attain a shape and grow so large that details could be picked out. Tompetch saw a broad, blue-green surface that he took for a sea, an irregular coastline that seemed to bear thick jungle, a

stretch of a wide river—and beyond, the unending void of open space. The apparition was perfectly round, cleanly cut without transition or middle ground. An island in space, seeming to mock all natural laws. Tompetch watched as the sea and the jungle-land expanded, finally reached maximum and began to shrink again. A double curve in the huge river had appeared last and it disappeared first as the impenetrable curtain of semispace started to close once more.

"It's shrinking again!" Tompetch cried fearfully. "We won't be able to make it!"

Reginald Bell did not stir. From the side Tompetch could see his otherwise jovial face which was now earnest—and severe. This was a Reginald Bell different from any Tompetch could remember and the sight surprised him so much that he became quiet at once.

The visible section of Wanderer's surface shrunk further. His thoughts whirling, Tompetch calculated that the period of expansion had lasted about 70 seconds, from 08:57:34 to 08:58:44. Now it was 08:59:05. Now there were only 50 seconds before it would be too late to land.

The Gazelle staggered for a moment as it passed through an invisible barrier.

"That was the forcefield!" Bell said. "Now we're as good as there!"

The small circular portion of the surface lay immediately below them. Tompetch watched with disbelieving eyes as the circle shrank increasingly, as more and more details that he had seen just a moment before suddenly slid out of existence. Below them lay jungle terrain.

Reginald Bell made a rough landing. Braking jets firing and blasting trees out of the way, he set the spaceboat down in the jungle precisely in the center of the still-visible surface, which now had a diameter of barely two kilometers.

For Tompetch the impact came completely without warning. He felt a heavy blow that knocked him forward. A wave of blood rushed into his head. He closed his eyes and gave in to the feeling of sitting in a carousel gone mad. He was afraid he would get sick but before things got to that point the carousel stopped turning and as he opened his eyes he saw around him on the vidscreen the green walls of the jungle. And high above the

treetops, an uncanny, black, threatening something coming toward him from all sides.

Reginald Bell unbuckled his seat belt and stood up, groaning. The Gazelle hung diagonally in the jungle underbrush.

"We're there," said Bell, somewhat uncertain. "There's no doubt about that. But how will things go from here?"

The black wall advanced closer over the trees. Tompetch was afraid of it. Without realizing it, he toyed with the safety belt buckle, opened it and shoved the belt to the side. Tompetch stood up and felt like running away. But Bell, who seemed to read his thoughts, laid his hand on Tompetch's shoulder. "Now, now, Tompetch. It can't be as bad as all that!"

Tompetch trembled. His eyes wide open, he watched as the black wall sucked up one tree after the other and came towards the spaceboat. "Look!" he cried, beside himself with fear. "It's going to—"

Then it was dark. The black wall had captured them. Nothing more was to be seen of the trees outside. Unbelieving, Tompetch stared at the small instrument lights on the control panel, shining as though nothing had ever happened. He looked down at himself, then looked at Reginald Bell who stood smiling next to him. He suddenly felt ashamed. He covered his face with his hand and closed his eyes. After awhile Bell heard him say lowly: "I'm sorry, sir. I've behaved like a small child."

Bell laid his hand on Tompetch's shoulder for the second time. "Don't take it so hard," he said. "I felt the same way you did—I was just as frightened as you were. And now shut off all the instruments. We need darkness if we want to see anything!"

Tompetch looked at him in astonishment. Then he climbed the inclined floor up to the control panel and reversed the main switch. The humming that had previously filled the control room died away and the instrument lamps went out. The darkness became complete.

Tompetch stayed where he was. He felt around for guidance, then sank down into the pilot's seat. He stared into the darkness. After awhile he saw the outline of the chair arms, then the dully shining surface of the vidscreen became visible and finally he saw Reginald Bell's blurred figure take shape four meters away. Tompetch rubbed his eyes, trying to rid himself of any

hallucinations. In this dimension there could not be any light. It was semispace, as he had been told, impossible for any human being to imagine and devoid of any phenomena a man could sense like light, sound and warmth.

But the image remained. Here was the seat, there the vidscreen and back there the unmoving Reginald Bell.

"Do you see something?" Bell asked suddenly.

"Yes sir," Tompetch answered hesitantly. "I think I can make you out."

"That's great!" said Bell triumphantly. "It's the same for me, too, but I thought it was an illusion. So there's a trace of light in this semispace."

He climbed a bit farther upwards toward the front in order to get a better look at the panorama-vidscreen. Tompetch strained to see something on the screen and after a short time made out the outlines of the trees that the black wall had recently swallowed up. He attempted to identify the color of the sky showing over the treetops and decided that it was a dark red.

"Do you see the sky red like I do?" Bell asked at that moment.

Tompetch said yes.

"We'll have to compare all our impressions here," Bell explained as he sensed Tompetch's wonderment. "Here you can't be certain that two men will sense the same thing the same way. I don't want to run any risks. Say, you were watching the vidscreen—could you show me on a map where we are?"

Tompetch remembered the double curve of the river which he had seen and, further, that the Gazelle had at most put five kilometers between it and the riverbank before it landed.

"I believe so, sir," he answered. "Yes, I can."

"Then turn on the lights. We want to get ourselves oriented."

Tompetch manipulated the main switch again. As the equipment started to hum once more, he switched the light on. Reginald Bell slid across the slanting floor to a wall cabinet and drew out a packet of maps. "You know, of course," he said, climbing up to Tompetch, "that Wanderer is a world resembling the conception the ancients had of Earth: a flat disc whose sides

one could fall over if it weren't for the forcefield. We've mapped the planet's surface and all measurements are exact, although we didn't have much time back then. It could be that many of the details aren't shown."

Tompetch nodded and took the packet. Impatient and curious he took out the map and laid it out on the table.

"The forcefield," Bell continued, "has a rather useful side effect, as we found out. It creates a magnetic field with whose help directions can be determined. The map is drawn in the usual way: north at the top and south at the bottom."

Meanwhile Tompetch had begun to slide his finger across the map. He found a number of rivers drawn in but none of them showed the particular double bend that he had seen. He searched along the seacoasts and at length found a river mouth whose size made it more of a bay. From the bay a narrow blue streak forced its way into the hinterlands and only 50 kilometers inland increased to the width that let Tompetch believe it was the same river he had seen.

"We were just as surprised about it as you are," Bell said. "A river 10 times broader close to the source than it is at the mouth. Do you know where It got the idea?"

Tompetch shook his head in puzzlement.

"Are you familiar with the Amazon River?" Bell asked.

"Yes, from the maps I've seen."

"Good, because then you must have heard of the narrows at Obidos. The Amazon, several kilometers wide up to that point, narrows at Obidos to less than one kilometer. I've seen the narrows myself and really there's nothing unusual to see. But you feel at that place the tremendous power of the river concentrated at that narrow place. It seemed to impress It , anyway. It created this river following the example of the Amazon. And from the river narrows at Obidos It made a 50-kilometer long stretch where the river races along at the speed of an airplane."

Tompetch's eyes went wide. "You mean, sir, that he ... or It ... saw that on the Earth?"

"Didn't you know that?" Bell asked, somewhat surprised. "This world is artificial. And not only the world but every riverbend, every mountain and every seashore is artificial. It has looked around in the Galaxy and recreated here on Wanderer what It liked best."

Struck dumb by amazement, Tompetch turned back to the map. He followed the Amazon-like river about 90 kilometers inland and found the double bend he had seen before the landing. Tompetch drew a straight line from the double bend of the river to a point about five kilometers to the northwest. It was in the middle of an area whose color indicated it as 'tropical rainforest.'

"Here," said Tompetch. "We must have landed here."

Reginald Bell scratched his head. Then he traced a path with his finger from the point Tompetch had designated clear across the map, crossing two seas and an island continent on the way, and finally stopped on the southern coast of a large land mass far to the north.

"We couldn't have done worse if we'd tried," Bell muttered unhappily. "The entire disc has a diameter of 8,000 kilometers and it's 6,000 kilometers from here to the city where the physiotron is!"

He glanced mistrustfully at the vidscreen but now, since the lights were on, he could not make anything out. Sighing, he turned off the lights.

"We'll get started as soon as we can at least see something," he said to Tompetch from the darkness. "If the light-locator works, we'll be OK. If it doesn't..."

He left the matter of what would happen then, an open question. Tompetch heard him go to the pilot's seat and sit down.

"Sit down here next to me," Tompetch heard him say not much later. "Take the map and use the light-locator. Leaving a few control lights burning should give you enough light to make the necessary comparisons."

Tompetch obeyed. He stumbled over something that lay in his way as he went to his seat with the map but as he sat down he noticed that his eyes had already begun to accustom themselves to the darkness. On the vidscreen appeared the first outlines of trees.

Reginald Bell let a quarter of an hour go by. When he felt that he could see the outer world as well as he ever would, he switched on the motors. He waited until the usual singing noise sounded loud and clear, telling him that everything was in order, then he slowly pulled the throttle down.

In doing so, he kept his, eye on the vidscreen. He expected the tree outlines to drop out of sight as the spaceboat straightened itself out but nothing of the sort happened. He had pulled the large main switch, which regulated the function of the motors according to a series of preprogrammed figures, down more than half way, and under normal conditions that would have meant that the Gazelle would have shot up into the sky like a cannonball. Instead, it simply lay between the trees and did not move.

Reginald Bell pulled the switch a little farther down, stared again at the vidscreen and felt the sweat pour down as the trees stayed unmoving in place. What would happen if the engines gave out completely? They were caught in the middle of a vast forest probably swarming with unknown animals. The nearest open space, the river, was five kilometers away at least. And even had the river been only 100 meters away, Bell would have not dared to leave the spaceboat until he knew whether or not his weapons functioned the same on this triple-cursed world.

With an angry jerk he pulled the switch all the way down. He had not expected any success but the trees outside suddenly began to recede. With disbelieving, wide-open eyes Bell watched as other small branches came into view at the top of the screen, slid past and disappeared at the bottom. Finally nothing more could be seen on the opaque screen than the deep red of Wanderer's sky.

A welter of thoughts shot through his mind simultaneously. He heard the high-pitched singing of the motors, laboring under maximum power as called for by the position of the master switch. Bell had called for an average range of acceleration. Under normal circumstances the Gazelle should have risen at an acceleration 100-times normal. The fact it did not was not due to the motors. However, the antigravity generator, which created a shock-absorbing field, oriented itself to the motors. If it had operated according to its program, there should now have a 100-times normal counterfield in effect in the spaceboat's interior And since the Gazelle in reality was accelerating at a rate of hardly one meter per second,

the counterfield should have smashed the Gazelle's two occupants within moments.

But there was no counterfield.

Bell went pale with the thought of what would have happened if not for two mysterious effects—the force preventing the spaceboat from rising at a rate of acceleration 100-times normal, and the disappearance of the counterfield—that appeared simultaneously and canceled each other out.

He threw a swift glance to the side to Tompetch but Tompetch seemed to have nothing to worry about. He had not recognized the threatening aspects of the situation and Bell decided not to make him aware of them.

His hands sweating, Bell directed the Gazelle in a northerly direction, attempting to make for the south coast of the great equatorial ocean.

Mike Tompetch busied himself with the light-locator. He checked over the instrument lights and was content to see that they were all aglow and that the device was ready for use. He made his first attempt. On a turn of a knob, a richly energized charge of light fanned out from the Gazelle, struck the surface of the planet three kilometers below and was reflected back, indicating on a TV screen the shape of the land below as they moved along above it. Tompetch stared entranced at the screen and the first thing he saw was the shape of the river as it flowed in a straight fine to the ocean. He saw the coastline become visible and, to the south, the irregular surface of the jungle.

The light-locator functioned. Tompetch reported it to Bell with a triumphant voice, switched the locator to automatic sensing and began to compare the picture on the screen with the map.

An hour ticked by thus—an hour in which Reginald Bell constantly wiped the sweat from his brow and Mike Tompetch saw nothing more than the never-changing surface of the ocean. He had determined that, according to the map, a long narrow island lay about 200 kilometers before the south coast and that the Gazelle would have to fly over it if it held to its course. Because of the slow speed at which they moved, the appearance of the island could not be expected before another hour had passed.

Tompetch leaned back and sank into his thoughts. By chance his glance fell on the light-locator screen. He gave a start and leaned forward with a

small cry of astonishment. "The island, sir...!" he gasped.

"What island?" Bell demanded harshly.

"200 miles off the south coast there's a long, narrow island, sir. Since we're moving at only 100 kilometers per hour, we shouldn't have reached it for some time. But here... here it is, lying right below us!"

Bell looked suspiciously at the vidscreen. "Are you sure you looked at the map right?"

"Absolutely, sir," Tompetch answered.

"Then the light-locator isn't working right. It's got the wrong direction. It's picked up something lying 100 kilometers ahead of us."

Tompetch had begun to calculate. Bell saw him compare the island's outline on the map with its image on the vidscreen. He seemed to have been surprised by his results.

Mouth open and stammering, Tompetch looked at Bell. "The island... it should be 50 kilometers wide and 300 kilometers long, sir... The length is right but the width... according to the vidscreen is only 25 kilometers!"

Bell leaped up. He compared the size of the island as given by the map with Tompetch's figures and found, like Tompetch, that the width was 50 kilometers. Then he turned to the vidscreen and saw on his first glance that there the island was only 25 kilometers wide.

He began calculating both observations together. The island lay only 100 kilometers south of the coast, although the distance given on the map was 200 kilometers. The island was now 25 kilometers wide even though it should have been 50. There seemed to be only one explanation.

Wanderer had shrunk to half its former size!

4/ MINI-CONTINENT

At 09:15 on the morning of April 26, 2042 all preparations for the teletransmission of the Gazelle had been completed. On board the craft slowly gliding towards the hangar airlock were Perry Rhodan; Atlan the Arkonide; Dr. Ali el Jagat, chief mathematician of the Drusus , John

Marshall and André Noir, two mutants from the ship's crew; and the motionless body of Nathan, the being from Solitude.

As the inner airlock hatch opened and allowed the Gazelle entry to the vast interior of the lock itself, the time remaining was now down to 135 hours.

As was his custom, Perry Rhodan had taken over the piloting of the spaceboat himself. His impatience repressed only with difficulty, he waited until the airlock had been pumped empty and the outer hatch had opened sufficiently wide for the Gazelle to pass through. Slowly he let the craft glide out into space and he held his breath in anticipation of the shock that had to come as soon as the transport field of the teletransmitter had seized the Gazelle.

The transport field began outside the protective forcefield around the Drusus , extending about 150 meters beyond the ship's outer walls. One could not see the beginning of the field. On the vidscreens could be seen only the blackness of space and an occasional flickering emanating from pieces of cosmic dust striking the ship's forcefield and turning into energy.

Perry Rhodan suddenly felt how unlikely the undertaking in which they were involved was. At stake was immortality, which was inconceivable. The action took place—or was supposed to take place—in a space that lay between the dimensions; and that was not only unimaginable, it was absurd. Out there, beyond the forcefields of the Drusus , waited a transport field that would bring the Gazelle and its occupants without any loss of time to a destination several million kilometers away and in the process contradict all the fundamentals of the Terran physics of just 100 years before.

Perry Rhodan felt terror mount inside—the atavistic fear of the unknown, the incomprehensible.

He reacted to that as he was accustomed to react: he became angry. He shot the Gazelle ahead with a wild spurt and let it race into the region where the transport field of the teletransmitter waited. He tensed his muscles, waiting for the expected shock, and then he realized with terror that the shock was even worse than he had anticipated.

It hit him with the force of a jackhammer. A hull of steel seemed to have formed about his body in a thousandth of a second, fitting his shape

exactly. It began to compress. He screamed and could not even hear his own voice. He was puzzled by the darkness around him and could not understand why he could no longer see nor hear his companions. He tried to resist the powerful force bearing down on him but the more he strained the worse the pain grew. He held still, ceased screaming and attempted to bear the incomprehensible. But the pain became so overpowering that he lost consciousness for a few seconds.

As he came to once more, he was bathed in sweat. Colored rings danced in front of his eyes and his lungs felt as though he had just made a run of 10,000 meters. But in spite of the pain that still bothered him, he could see that the Gazelle was a few kilometers above that strange landscape which he still well remembered.

With disbelieving surprise, he realized that the transport had succeeded. Blinking, he looked up at the bright sun shining far away in a blue sky, lavishly flooding the parkland below with light.

They were on Wanderer.

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Nathan conversed with the alien for as long as the latter was interested, then fell silent. Meanwhile Nathan had collected a good deal of information. He knew where lay the city that was the goal of his friends. And since he had nothing better to do, he made his way towards it.

He found himself in an odd frame of mind. The loss of his body did not affect him especially. In the first place, he was certain that his friend would aid him in reuniting him with it and in the second place it would not be any great loss for him if he had to live out his life as a disembodied form. He would feel pain if his friend—should he never find him—decided to move his dead body so far away that his mental reflexes could no longer reach it and thereafter had to be stored in his incorporeal form. But the pain would be bearable.

That was not it, then. No, what Nathan felt was the same feeling he had already had while on his way through the darkness of space to this strange world: the feeling of loneliness. He had never felt it before. For on Solitude

the inhabitants lived in large herds and anyone who left the herd for awhile could do so with no danger for he could always find another herd a few kilometers away which would be happy to take him in. There was no such thing as loneliness on Solitude. Or rather, there had not been until the Druufs came and captured the Solitudians to lock them up. But Nathan remembered that even then he had not ever felt lonely. He could, in his present form, find and communicate with the non-material forms of other prisoners. Besides, the feeling of anger towards the Druufs overpowered all other feelings.

But there was nothing here. Here he was alone on an artificial world whose ruler sat in a distant city and who meanwhile had become tired of conversing with him. There was no one with whom he could communicate. What he saw, heard and felt had to be kept to himself, although it was the way of his race to converse, exchange experiences, reporting various events, thinking together and thereby being pleased and happy.

Here there was not even anything to experience. This world seemed to be empty. Nathan had landed on one of the huge grassy plains which stretched into the green-blue haze of the distance. There was nothing here but grass and a few beetles between the blades.

Hardly had Nathan completed that thought than he suddenly perceived motion of some sort. At first he saw only a few dark and swiftly moving dots gliding low over the grass. The points grew larger and Nathan saw that in reality they were 4-legged creatures racing towards him at high speed. As they were still 100 meters away, Nathan noticed how oddly they were formed: they had a head, four legs and a tail but on their backs grew a second, smaller body which also had a head and two legs. At lightning speed Nathan mirrored the most forward of the strange creatures and ran to meet it in the same way it ran towards him. The forward creature suddenly became aware of him and stopped. With that it reared up on its hind legs, dangling its forelegs in the air. Nathan saw that the partial body growing out of the back moved violently and quickly and that it suddenly held an object in its hand. The object consisted of a straight and a bent piece which met at their ends: Nathan saw the being take a long staff, which was oddly ornamented at one end, and lay it along the device. Then the staff suddenly shot forward and sped humming through Nathan's astral form. The strange being was astounded, as were his fellows coming from behind. Nathan,

however, galloped onward while yet still a few meters from the head creature, it turned and ran off. Nathan heard a hoarse cry. He watched as the head belonging to the back-implanted partial body turned around to look at him numerous times. Nathan felt the small incident as nothing but some welcome fun and ran behind the strange beings.

Then something very strange happened. The partial body growing out of the back of the last of the running creatures came loose and fell into the grass. The rest of the creature ran on. That which had fallen off stood up from the grass and limped along, howling.

Nathan realized his error: each of these beings actually consisted of two separate creatures—a four-legged one, like the one now chasing after the rest of the group and a two-legged one like the one which had sat on the first's back and now had fallen off. The fallen being was built similarly to Nathan's friend and the other strangers but its clothing was different and on its head it wore a colorful ornament.

Nathan took on a new form, this time mimicking the two-legged being still limping through the grass in front of him. He glided behind it, caught up and stood in front of it, blocking the way. He saw its eyes open wide and the mouth open as well. He heard it scream and he made a gesture intended to be calming. However, the strange creature grabbed for an object made of a piece of wood and a piece of metal which had been affixed to part of its clothing; raised it, came closer to Nathan and threw it. Nathan heard the metal-wood object whiz through him and land on the ground behind. The alien screamed shrilly, then stumbled backwards and fell to the ground. It did not move any more.

Nathan was simultaneously astounded and horrified. He had not wanted to hurt the alien, he had only wanted to find out if he could exchange thoughts with it; but evidently there was something about his astral form that frightened the alien. It was not dead, as Nathan saw from a steady movement of the being's trunk, but merely unconscious. It would soon stand up and run again after the 4-legged creature from which it had fallen.

Nathan diffused into a formless cloud in order not to frighten the alien anymore should he suddenly wake up, then floated away.

Suddenly he heard again the shrill, loud laughter of amusement belonging to the invisible lord of the planet. He heard it call out: "Poor friend! Did you scare him and thus scare yourself? You have no need to fear. He isn't real. He is only a shadow."

Nathan understood nothing. The stranger seemed to notice his confusion.

"Didn't you say you have a friend?" he asked. "He's waiting out there in a giant spaceship for something to happen so that he can reach this world, right? The beings you've seen here come from his home world. There, they call them Indians."

Nathan looked back at the alien being lying far below in the grass, unconscious with terror.

"It looks real, doesn't it?" said the stranger, amused. "Even though it's only a shadow."

Nathan considered the concept of 'shadow'. It could not mean the bodiless existence because the alien creature had been solid and real. It , the ruler of this world, seemed to know of another means of Spirit-Matter transformation.

Nathan waited for the stranger to speak again. But it did not. The brief conversation seemed to have been enough for it. Nathan looked up into the sky and saw an odd animal glide through the air with a wide wingspan. He looked at it for awhile, then moved off again.

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According to the scale on the map the distance from the island in the ocean to the north coast should have been 1,800 kilometers. However, the figure Mike Tompetch read from the vidscreen of the light-locator varied between 700 and 850 kilometers. The uncertainty was due to the fact that the Gazelle's speed was not known within 20% of the exact figure. Seeing that he could no longer rely on comparisons with the map, Reginald Bell had calculated a rough formula.

The shrinking had increased. If, at the beginning, they had flown over the island in the ocean while the ratio was 1:2, now it was about 1:2.3. Bell

wondered if the variance in the figures couldn't be due to the inexactitude of the measurement or if the shrinking actually was a phenomenon even now in progress.

Since the time the Gazelle had freed itself under full power from the jungle, 10 hours had gone by.

Reginald Bell took the time to consider the changes in the surface of Wanderer. He remembered what he had heard before the flight from the Drusus and tried to make it correspond with what he saw with his own eyes on the sensor screen. Someone had come up with a theory of semispace according to which Wanderer was to be found in a rotating area of spatial instability. The rotation affected the axes of hyperspace and altered them, whereby the alteration was a constant function of the speed of rotation. What did it mean, alteration of an axis? Reginald Bell remembered that only a shortening had always been talked about. For an observer not taking part in the rotation, shortening an axis meant nothing but shrinking the scale. A stretch of land one kilometer long to an observer taking part in the rotation would only be 500 meters or even 100 meters long to an unaffected observer, depending on the degree of shortening. With that the effect which Bell and Tompetch had been wondering about for hours was explained.

However, Reginald Bell realized quickly that this explanation was anything but comforting. Just as one or more of the spatial axes could be affected by the alteration, so could the time-axis, which would in turn mean that nothing certain could be said about the rate time passed on Wanderer relative to its passage aboard the Gazelle.

The Gazelle had in the meantime left the equatorial ocean behind and was starting to cross a continent measuring 2,500 kilometers or so in a straight north-south line. At least the continent was 2,500 kilometers wide on the map; on the sensor screen, Tompetch had made his first readings and the continent measured only 1,000 kilometers. In other words, the foreshortening factor had increased. The ratio was now 1:2.5.

With some relief Bell realized that the effect was to some degree favorable. When it is not known how much time one has, it is good being required to traverse only 2,000 or 3,000 kilometers rather than 6,000. He was thinking that just as the motors gave out.

It happened suddenly and without warning. One moment the high-pitched whine of the motors filled the small control room; the next, it died out. It was suddenly deathly quiet in the Gazelle interior.

Then Tompetch screamed in terror. He stared at the vidscreen, watching the continental outlines below increase in size with growing speed, seemingly coming straight toward the Gazelle. The antigravity maintained normal weight in the spaceboat cabin and neither Bell nor Tompetch felt the lightness of free fall. Yet there was no doubt that the craft was falling and in a few moments would smash against the ground.

Reginald Bell began to act. With a single press of the button he intensified the protective forcefield that enveloped the Gazelle and with grim satisfaction listened to the hollow roar that penetrated the hull, emanating from the air outside being displaced by the falling spaceboat. With a balled fist Reginald Bell hit another switch and added to the forcefields an artificial gravitational field that counteracted Wanderer's gravity and braked the fall. Tompetch watched on his sensor screen as the image slowly came to rest while the gravitational field began to have its effect. The roaring died down and the Gazelle sank as though it hung from a huge parachute.

With the help of his light-locator Mike Tompetch measured an altitude of just 1,200 meters and descent of six meters per second.

"Don't believe for a second that we'll land softly," Reginald Bell said suddenly. "Six meters per second is a lot. Keep your head down and hang on!"

It was uncanny, the dark-red world toward which they were falling. Bell tried to find something on the vidscreen to which he could orient himself. He saw a horizontal dark line running across the screen and assumed that it was the dividing line between earth and sky. Above it the screen was red; below it, the screen was black. There was no more to see.

They were still 2,000 or 3,000 kilometers from their goal and without the Gazelle, Bell knew, they would never reach it.

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Perry Rhodan looked around. Atlan smiled weakly. Marshall and Noir cowered in their seats, their eyes wide with fear. Ali el Jagat seemed to be unconscious, only now coming to. Nathan's still body was evidently the only thing aboard not to have been affected by the dangerous manoeuvre.

"I don't know what it was," said Rhodan, attempting to make his voice sound as reassuring as possible, "but in any case we seem to have withstood it pretty well. We're here!"

Atlan slowly loosened his magnetic belt, letting it slide back into its holder, and answered: "Evidently the transport beam of the teletransmitter is a clumsy way of getting into this semispace. Good heavens, I thought a bomb was going off."

Perry Rhodan listened with only half an ear. Wanderer lay below them and it looked just as he remembered it. Being in semispace seemed not to have affected it. It must have noticed by this time that It had received some guests. Rhodan waited until It announced itself.

But when the roaring laughter finally sounded, Rhodan had no time to pay any attention to it. Just before the first echo resounded in his mind, he had taken note of something else: the Gazelle's motors had stopped!

Rhodan acted instinctively. There were but two manipulations which could be undertaken: pressing the button that would intensify the protective forcefields, and pulling the switch that would wrap the Gazelle in an artificial gravitational field. Once he had done both, he checked the motor controls. He pressed the test button, which lit up all the instrument lights connected to all still-functioning devices. Rhodan saw at first glance that only one light stayed dark, meaning all the equipment was in working order save one device.

This one exception was the energy supply for the motors. During the Gazelle's transition from Einstein space to semispace, someone... or something... had absorbed all the energy being channeled to the spaceboat's motors.

That reassured Rhodan. There were still a number of other generators on board and if he had enough time he was sure that he could connect the antigravity generator and the forcefield generators so that they channeled their energy into the motors instead of the antigrav field or into the

protective field. With the means he had at his disposal, he could finish the job in three or four days. That much time he still had.

He looked at the automatic calendar to convince himself he was right. As he read the lighted numerals he wanted to spring up and turn the mechanism back because at first sight he was certain someone had set the calendar wrong. Then, however, he remembered that he had checked the setting one last time before the Gazelle had left the Drusus. Since then, no one had had the opportunity to reset it. What he saw was correct, even if he could not explain how it had happened.

The chronometer read 15:32 hours. The date was April 30, 2042.

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The impact was not half as bad as Reginald Bell had imagined it would be. There was a strong shock. Bell felt like a jack hammer had slammed him into the upholstery of his seat but the pain lasted for only half a second. Then it was all over. Groaning, Reginald Bell got up and looked at the vidscreen. The first thing he saw was that it had grown brighter outside.

He tried to remember how far he had been able to see the last time he had looked at the vidscreen. His range of vision had certainly been no more than 100 meters. Now it had grown to at least one kilometer. On the other side of that boundary, outlines began to melt into the darkness. The sky now radiated an intense glowing red.

Mike Tompetch had also stood up. He seemed confused but the realization that finally something had happened which he understood—even if it was a most regretful crash—seemed to have returned to him the largest part of his former self-confidence. "We can check the instruments," he said. "If we can find out what's broken down, perhaps we can..."

"You're a smart boy, Tompetch," Bell interrupted. "I already checked during the fall. You won't believe this but someone has soaked up all energy from the generators like a thirsty man taking water from a sponge. And now the sponge is so dry you couldn't get another drop out of it even with a hydraulic press."

"But the antigravity and the forcefields..."

"Are still OK, right. Apparently their energy is in a form the energy thief can't use. I know what you're getting at: we can switch connections and fly with the antigravity or the forcefield energy. That's just what we're going to do. But first I want to look around a bit."

Tompetch pointed over his shoulder with his thumb at the vidscreen. "Out... there?"

Bell nodded. "Of course. There are some things we have to find out. For example, how well do the radio connections work when the sender is outside the Gazelle and the receiver is inside? After all, the physiotron is not going to come to me inside the ship—sooner or later I'm going to have to get out anyway."

He inspected the spacesuit which he was wearing. He gave special attention to his helmet, which up to now he had worn loosely on his back like a hood. Tompetch watched his preparations with wonder.

"I always thought," he said uncertainly, "that in respect to gravity, atmospheric content and air pressure Wanderer was a planet quite tolerable for Terrans. Are you expecting something else, sir?"

"Certainly," Bell answered. "You can see that the surface has shrunk. Figure out for yourself what will happen to the air pressure when all the air molecules in a cubic centimeter of air are squeezed into a space half that."

"Lord—I hadn't thought of that," Tompetch admitted. "That means the gravitation would increase too, right?"

"It would," Bell rumbled, "if it weren't artificial. The master of Wanderer makes his own gravity. The little that comes from the mass of the planet itself can be ignored. It could be that there would be a noticeable effect but it would be slight all the same."

With a decisive tug Bell brought the helmet down over his head and attached it to his collar ring. "I'm going now," he then said, his voice ringing hollowly over the exterior loudspeaker of his suit. "Sit down by the receiver and see how well you can understand me. All clear?"

"Right, sir," said Tompetch. He stood still and thoughtful long after Bell had left for the airlock.

Reginald Bell had already seen on the vidscreen inside the spaceboat that they had landed in a region which It had modeled after a completely alien world. Reginald Bell had never seen such strange plants as those growing out of the ankle-high, fleshy grass around the Gazelle. Although he was not familiar with them, he saw that the plants were affected and distorted by the odd foreshortening effect which apparently had befallen the entire planet and twisted all life into grotesque shapes.

Bell walked toward a growth that looked something like an Earthly mulberry tree. The main trunk might have been circular and 30 centimeters in diameter under normal circumstances but now it was elliptic. The long axis of the ellipse was still 30 centimeters but now the short axis measured only 11 or 12. The tree's branches spread broadly to the right and to the left but from back to front they had been stunted to less than ½ their normal span.

Bell found the same true for other things. Not far from the Gazelle he found lying on the ground a stone as flat as a pancake. He lifted it and turned it at an angle of 90°. The flat surfaces of the pancake began to shrink while the edges became thicker. By the time the turn had been completed, the former edges had become the flat top and bottom surfaces while the former top and bottom had become the edges.

So the shrinking was determined by a definite direction. That direction, Bell quickly realized, must correspond with the north-south axis of the planet. It might have been by sheer chance but at that moment Bell had the impression that he could make use of the observation. It could have been the first step to a good idea but Bell was still playing with the stone and let it fade back into his subconscious. When he tried to remember it five minutes later, he found he had forgotten completely whatever idea he'd had.

He made a few experiments in communication with Lt. Tompetch. Even on the first try he saw that conditions were not at all normal. Although he was at most 50 meters from the spaceboat, he could understand Tompetch only with difficulty and Tompetch confirmed it from his side, complaining that the connection was 'miserable'. Bell stepped somewhat closer to the Gazelle and reception improved immediately. He stepped back a few meters and the reception grew worse until it faded out entirely when he had moved 100 meters away. He started to calculate since the matter interested him.

Tompetch gave him a few figures concerning the transmitter power, as registered by a wattmeter on the receiver. Taking these figures into account, Bell found a noteworthy regularity. Symbolizing the distance of the transmitter from the receiver with r, under normal conditions the signal broadcast by an electromagnetic transmitter varied at a rate of 1/r2. If the transmitter were 20 meters away from the receiver, then only ¼ of the transmitting power would be received as would be if the transmitter were only 10 meters away, or half as far.

Here things were different. There was a functional relationship between transmitter power and relative distance but the figure was 1/r6. When the distance was doubled, the signal weakened at the receiving end to 1/64th. That was surprising. It could be explained only by assuming that there was something in the air which soaked up radiated energy. The phenomenon had a peculiar similarity with the disappearance of the motor energy. Reginald Bell tried to formulate a reasonable hypothesis that would explain these events but since he had too little information to work with, he was not successful. In a bad mood he made his way back to the spaceboat and in so doing walked past the pseudo-mulberry tree, whose trunk by this time had been compressed to eight centimeters.

He raised his arm and looked at the barometer, which along with other instruments had been built into the plastic material of his spacesuit. At the moment, air pressure measured 2.8 atmospheres.

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For the first time Perry Rhodan was angered by the roaring laughter. While the Gazelle fell towards the park landscape below with the speed of an overloaded parachute, the telepathically transmitted laughter of the Wanderer-being resounded in his ears and drove him into white-hot rage. He whirled about—as though there were some exact direction from which the laughter came—and exploded in pure anger: "Stop it, you old fool! There isn't a blasted thing to laugh about!"

The laughter died in the same instant. Perry Rhodan didn't know if one could speak to It , the all but all-powerful lord of Wanderer, in this manner,

but it was all the same to Rhodan. He had to get that laughter stopped; that alone was important.

He saw his companions staring at him. In the next moment he heard that distant and yet quite loud voice:

"Nervous, my friend?" The voice sounded curious and friendly. It did not care if it were called an old fool, then. "Were I in your place, I would be too. You are still 4,000 kilometers from the great hall and you have only 30 hours. How are you going to do it?"

Rhodan shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know," he answered aloud, knowing that thoughts were best expressed when vocalized. "I don't have any idea. But you can count on this, old friend: I'll be there on time!"

The laughter thundered for a second time. "I'm amusing myself royally,"It continued. "I've never experienced a situation like this. I managed to get the better of some strange people who wanted to kidnap me into an alien time-plane but apparently doing so cost me quite a bit in Eiris ."

"Quite a bit in what? " demanded Rhodan.

"Eiris,"It answered readily. "That's what we called chronospatial stabilizing energy—when we still spoke with our mouths."

"Aha," said Rhodan, not understanding.

"Naturally I can replenish the energy,"It went on, "but since you and your friends are here, I don't have to. You are setting in motion everything necessary to bring my world back into normal space again."

Rhodan did not understand one word and this he freely admitted.

"You don't have to understand,"It answered in amusement. "Everything will happen by itself. It's enough that you're here."

At that moment, the Gazelle hit. There was a strong jolt, someone cried out in pain, a piece of plastic broke loudly somewhere—and then all was still again.

Rhodan had not even lost his balance. "There was another spacecraft that came here," he told It. "What do you know about it?"

"Hardly anything,"It answered. "The second vehicle is not in my plane. It has remained in normal space, along with its occupants."

"Does that mean they aren't here on this world?"

"Yes they are here indeed."It began to laugh again. "I could get angry when I think of the fun I'm missing because I'm unable to watch them as they try to find their way in this alien dimension!"

"Good heavens!" Rhodan exclaimed. "I wish I could understand you."

"Don't try to understand it,"It advised. "But remember, my friend, that you now have only 30 hours left. Just 30 hours. If you don't want to die, you had better do something."

With that the connection was broken and Rhodan could no longer reach It. He had wanted to inquire about Nathan, who must also be somewhere on Wanderer.

He gave his seat a push and let it turn so that he could see his companions. "I know there isn't much point in it," he said with a forced smile, "but if we worked hard at it, we might yet succeed in changing the generator hookups."

He looked at John Marshall. Marshall was a telepath. He could read Rhodan's thoughts—even those saying that it was all useless and that they would never reach their goal,his goal, unless someone from outside helped them. Marshall returned the glance and winked. He did not look especially happy, either, but he understood there was no use in destroying all hope at once by making public what Rhodan was thinking.

But then Atlan spoke up. "Friend, I don't believe there would be much sense in our busying ourselves with the generators. We don't have the time to take on any such massive overhauls; we would be too late no matter what. The leap here from the Drusus cost us time and propulsive energy. We should rather consider how this loss came about. If we know that, then perhaps we could find a faster way to overcome our difficulties than would be possible by reconnecting the generators."

He looked attentively at Rhodan, clearly expecting an answer. He was more earnest than anyone had seen him in the previous 10 days.

"Perhaps," repeated Rhodan. "We can't depend on a perhaps. We have to do something, even if it seems senseless. Perhaps we could make an emergency switching..."

"Perhaps," Atlan interrupted mockingly. "You're repeating yourself, Administrator!"

Perry Rhodan gestured in irritation. "The devil with it! I just want to do something, that's all. Sitting around and pondering is not my style. But if you think you can find a solution that way, Admiral—no one will stop you!"

At that moment Ali el Jagat leaped out of his seat. Rhodan looked at him in surprise and saw that he was staring with an ashen face at the vidscreen. Rhodan followed his gaze and saw on the screen a strange figure appear between the trees. It wore medieval armor and carried a jousting shield on the left arm. The right hand carried a long spear. The figure sat on a horse, whose head and chest were also armored.

The figure stopped his horse before the Gazelle's hatch, lowered the lance and threw it with all his strength at the hatch cover. At the same time the exterior microphone picked up an angry voice:

"Who dares to enter the land of Count Llandrindod uninvited? Out with him! I shall make him atone for his impudence!"

And at the same time,It's laughter echoed hollowly as It began to amuse Itself over the incident.

Reginald Bell suddenly remembered the idea he'd had—. It came to him so unexpectedly that he dropped the tool he had been holding in his hand while working with Tompetch at rebuilding the antigravity generator. Tompetch straightened up from his stooped position and looked at Bell in surprise.

Bell slapped himself on the forehead. "What an idiot I've been!" he moaned. "How could I have forgotten?" Then he looked to Mike Tompetch. "Let that go," he ordered. "Quit and come with me. I know something better."

Tompetch obeyed in astonishment. Reginald Bell climbed through the narrow engine room passage forward to the control room. He opened the

batch and pointed even before Tompetch could see what he meant on the vidscreen.

"There!" Bell cried. "Look at that and tell me what you think of it. I know it sounds crazy but what do you want to bet that we can get where we're going this way?"

Mike Tompetch looked at the vidscreen and tried to guess what Bell could have meant.

They had been in the engine room for half an hour and in that time the landscape had changed into something unbelievably grotesque. The bushes and trees were flat, as though a child had cut them out of a picture-book and stood them up. They stood close behind one another. The effect was of a photograph taken with a super telescopic lens.

At the upper edge of the picture Mike Tompetch saw a narrow red strip just under the red-glowing sky. It was distinguishable from the heavens only by a pulsating flickering. Tompetch had no idea what it was.

"Well, what do you think?" tell asked triumphantly.

"The foreshortening has increased," answered Tompetch, not knowing what else to say.

"So, it's really increased?" mocked Bell snidely. "Be careful that your brain doesn't shrink, too, Lieutenant. What do you see there at the edge of the picture?"

Tompetch swallowed. "I've been wondering that myself, sir."

"Then give up!" Bell told him. "That's the northern sea!"

"The northern sea?"

Reginald Bell nodded. "Right, the northern sea. We're lying not too far from the southern coast of this continent. How wide does the map say this continent is, by the way?"

Mike Tompetch remembered quickly. "2,500 kilometers, sir."

"Right". And how far would you say the northern coast is from us now, judging from the vidscreen, I mean?"

"Two to three kilometers, I'd say. No more than that."

"Yes, that's right. Two to three kilometers. What does that say about the foreshortening factor?"

"That it lies between 830 and 1,250," Tompetch answered after quickly figuring the ratio out in his head.

Reginald Bell agreed with that as well. "Now look to that flickering strip," he instructed, "while I explain something to you. I'm sure you'll see that it's getting closer."

Tompetch watched the vidscreen obediently while Reginald Bell began: "As you know, this system is in rotation. A hemisphere of a 5-dimensional rotation-figure possesses the odd tendency for foreshortening coordinate axes. A rotation takes place in a 5-dimensional continuum, so not all axes are involved with the foreshortening on each rotation, or, if they are, the relative scale of foreshortening changes from rotation to rotation.

"Apparently we have reached an especially favorable moment. The foreshortening ratio is now about 1:1,000. What is in reality a distance of 1,000 kilometers is for us only one single kilometer. Can you imagine what would happen if the ratio increases further? What if it reaches, oh, let's say 1:2,500,000?"

Tompetch gave a start. "That-that..." he stammered. He could not bring himself to say any more.

Reginald Bell completed the sentence for him. "That would mean this continent would be just one meter wide for us and that the distance from here to the southern coast of the north continent would be only two meters. We would need to make only three steps—one of them to cross a ditch 60 centimeters wide, which in reality is a sea 1,500 kilometers across."

Mike Tompetch stood awestruck. It was obvious that he could repeat the figures to himself but that he could not visualize the picture Bell had painted. Bell clapped him on the shoulder and said in a fatherly tone: "Close your mouth, Lieutenant. It isn't really that simple, of course. The air pressure would have grown to a few thousand atmospheres in the meantime and the air itself would feel like a gluey soup. We'll have to prepare for it. We'll need a small forcefield generator to protect ourselves against the terrible pressure because the spacesuits alone won't hold up to it, Come on —what are you waiting for? Let's get started!"

5/ WANDERERS ON A WEIRD WORLD

"Llandrindod!" Atlan exclaimed, laughing. "The old fighter! I'm going to..."

He rushed off. Perry Rhodan, who knew how It had populated its planet with peculiar figures out of the past of Earth and other worlds, followed him calmly and a little amused. The appearance of a medieval knight before an emergency-landed spacescout whose crew was struggling to find out the best way to connect an antigravity generator to the motors to find a way of supplying energy to the propulsion drive—wasn't that a situation to raise a smile even though the dangers threatening from outside were so large?

Atlan had long opened the hatch by the time Rhodan arrived. On Wanderer spaceships could be opened up in a casual fashion conditions on other worlds forbade; the inner and outer hatches could even be left open simultaneously. Wanderer's atmosphere was identical to Earth's.

The Earl of Llandrindod had pulled his horse back a few steps as the hatch opened.

Atlan stayed in the hatchway. With a rumbling voice he spoke out in the same Old English Llandrindod used. "Who presumes to knock on my flying house? What manner of scoundrel would dare do such a thing?"

Rhodan was certain that the Earl of Llandrindod had never before in his life been called a scoundrel. He watched as the knight started, then raised his shield and lowered his lance.

"Villain!" thundered from behind the visor. "Attend thee! I shall teach you to call me a scoundrel! Defend yourself, you good-for-nothing wretch!"

His shield was up and his lance was down. He was about to spur his horse and ride towards Atlan but at that moment the Arkonide threw his arms into the air and began to laugh loudly. Llandrindod seemed to become uncertain. The shield sank a bit.

"Guye of Llandrindod!" Atlan roared, laughing. "What a fool you are! Or have the years taken so much of your sight with them you don't even recognize your best friend anymore?"

The knight raised his visor. Distrustful, narrowed eyes came into view. They took stock of the Arkonide, who must have seemed dressed like a fool or a jester by medieval standards, and then the first spark of recognition lit up.

"God save me!" cried Llandrindod. "If you're Peyrefitte of Sherwood, my friend, then you're dressed like a gypsy! Are you really Sherwood?"

Atlan stepped down from the hatch. "That I am!" he assured him. "Climb down from your mount and greet me like a man greets a friend!"

Llandrindod let his shield and lance fall, slid down from his horse and came towards the Arkonide with stiff, slow steps. The closer he came, the more certain he was that it was really his friend before him. The

steps grew longer and he finally stumbled, fortunately falling right into the Arkonide's arms.

"Good heavens, Sherwood!" he exclaimed. "I thought I'd never see you again, you old war-horse! Where have you been?"

"Everywhere," laughed Atlan. "I was here and there, in Turkey, in France, in Russia..."

"What journeys you must have had!" Llandrindod pointed at the Gazelle. "And is that something you've brought back from those far places?"

"Yes," Atlan answered. "It can fly through the air."

"Through the air!"

"That's right. There exists a mighty force inside which enables it to fly through the air like a bird. But now the force is gone and it can no longer lift itself from the ground."

Llandrindod began to laugh. He laughed heartily, as though at a good joke. Then a thought seemed to suddenly occur to him and he stopped laughing. He looked at Atlan, bewildered. "A mysterious force, did you say?"

"That's correct, my friend."

Llandrindod scratched his head. "I've seen your force, Sherwood." he said.

Atlan was astounded. "You saw the force? But it's invisible!"

"So I thought. It wasn't very plain to see; but may the devil himself take me, I saw it. It was floating over the meadows. At first it looked like a thin cloud. It could be seen only if you looked at it for awhile. Then it seemed to discover me. It began to ball itself up and suddenly it had taken on the shape of me astride my horse. It galloped toward me. I was not caught napping—I raised my shield and couched my lance and sprang forward to meet it. It didn't strike me but I struck it... or tried to. But it was for naught. The lance went right on through, as though cleaving empty air, and came out the other side. When I drew my horse to a stop and looked around, the stranger had vanished as utterly as though the devil fetched him away. Could that mayhap have been your force?"

Atlan considered. It was possible that Llandrindod had encountered some other of the beings that It had used to populate its planet, like Llandrindod himself, but more probable was that he had crossed Nathan's path.

"We have to capture it again, Guye!" he exclaimed. "Where did you see it?"

Llandrindod pointed behind him. "Back there, no further than a good hour's ride from here, half way to Llandrindod Castle."

He sized up Atlan closely and a little mistrustfully. His face showed how little he liked the matter of the mysterious force.

"Say, Sherwood," he began hesitantly, "have you gotten tangled up in something that may be the devil's own business?"

Atlan shook his head. "I'll explain it to you some other time, Llandrindod, but I'll say this much: far to the East where the Russians, Turks, Persians and other peoples live, there are more things than we dream of. These things have nothing to do with the devil and we can make good use of them. Will you do me a favor?"

Llandrindod seemed reassured. He nodded. "Certainly."

"Ride back to where you saw the force. We'll follow you as fast as we can to capture it. Will you wait for us?"

Llandrindod nodded again. He turned, went back to his horse and mounted. "I'll wait!" he called to the Arkonide. "And when we've captured it again, then you'll show me how your flying house works! And after that we'll celebrate with a banquet! Not in your house—too unholy for my tastes!—but in Llandrindod Castle!"

With these words he turned his horse and trotted off. Atlan stepped thoughtfully back into the hatchway. He saw Rhodan standing by the inner hatch and gave a start.

"It was Llandrindod," Atlan said, still not quite back to reality and seeming a little self-conscious. "An old warrior, half-English and half-Welsh. He helped King Edward I conquer Wales. I saw him last in the year 1305."

He looked past Rhodan and Rhodan saw how powerful the urge in him must be to tell the whole story of the conquest of Wales and his role as the Earl of Sherwood. The urge drove him to disclose everything his photographic memory had recorded and let another chapter of Terran history come to life for the ears of his listeners. He was driven by some strange power to tell his story each time some keyword out of history reminded him of something he had experienced long ago. Up to now he had not been able to resist the urge but there had also been no reason why he should resist it. Now, however, the situation was different: they could not lose any more time, no matter how interesting the story of the Earl of Sherwood might be.

Perry Rhodan took the Arkonide by the arm and led him through the main corridor back to the control room.

"Did he know something important?" Rhodan asked, hoping to divert the center of Atlan's attention.

Atlan woke up from his trance. "Oh yes," he answered. "He saw something that could very well be Nathan's disembodied form right here in the area, possibly five or six kilometers away. I sent him off to keep an eye out for Nathan and told him that we'd follow."

"I think," said Rhodan, "that at the moment we'd better pay more attention to the motors than to Nathan."

They entered the control room at the same moment that John Marshall, the telepath, made an astounding discovery on the vidscreen. He saw something coming from the south that at first looked like a man. At least it had the same size as a man. Then Marshall saw that it was a rather long figure, caught in the process of stretching out. It came from the south and Marshall could not see where it started; and it was, as he saw it for the first time several kilometers long. It was growing at a rate of about five meters a second.

Marshall could not figure out what it was in reality. It looked like a long pole someone was shoving north. Nothing was known of the pole's length but it was 1.8 meters high and about 80 centimeters wide.

Yet its cross section was not angular or otherwise geometrically regular, though there was a certain symmetry to it.

Marshall studied its shape for awhile, which was not difficult since he was looking at it almost straight on, and came to the surprising conclusion that it was shaped like a man, at least from the front. There was a head, two arms which were held somewhat away from the body so that one could see past them, and two legs that were spread somewhat apart. Marshall thought at first that it was simply a matter of a man at the front end of a pole—what he was doing there was a good question; but after all, this was Wanderer and not a normal world. But then Marshall suddenly picked up some thoughts. They came from the 'pole' and were oddly slow, yet easily understood. Above all, they were so characteristic of one person that John Marshall knew instantly who they were coming from.

As Perry Rhodan and the Arkonide entered the control room, Marshall turned to them. "I have something to report, sir," he said to Rhodan in a strained voice and pointed to the vidscreen. "Mr. Bell is coming towards us in a most extraordinary shape."

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Reginald Bell had to quickly realize that the contraction of an entire planet is in no way without danger for someone who is not involved with it. He had previously not even thought about the matter but he became aware of it when he noticed the first mountain coming towards him.

Bell was standing in front of the spaceboat to see how things were developing. In the last few minutes the foreshortening ratio had been rapidly increasing. It was easy to see the surface of the planet shrinking—if only in one direction: the width and height of objects remained unaffected and only their length was shortened into grotesquely slight measurements. The air pressure did not increase as Bell had at first suspected it would. He had thought it would grow in the same proportion as the distortion factor but when the distortion ratio had reached about 1:10,000, the air pressure was only 20 atmospheres. The small forcefield generators, which Mike Tompetch had prepared, were not needed yet.

With a distortion of 1:10,000, the south coast of the northern ocean was now only 250 meters away. The coast of the equatorial ocean, according to the map about 20 kilometers south of the Gazelle, had been shoved within two meters. Reginald Bell realized uncomfortably that to any inhabitants of Wanderer he must now seem like a shapeless monster five kilometers long. Seen from the front he would look normal but from the side... He called himself a 'Pole Man'. Just his boots, 40 centimeters long to his own eyes, were four kilometers long in the dimensions of this shrinking world, although their height and width were still the same.

When the distortion ratio had climbed to 1:100,000, the northern sea was only 25 meters away and the toes of Reginald Bell's boots had long stretched out over the coast of the equatorial ocean.

Bell turned around. His interest lay in the north, not in the south. He felt how the thickening air cramped his movements. The air pressure was now 50 atmospheres and the air itself behaved as though it were liquid. Bell had to use all his strength in making the turn. He felt nothing himself as his bodily proportions changed. The boots which had stuck out over the ocean shore shortened to normal size as Bell had made half the turn, then began to grow again as he proceeded to the second half. Bell's shoulders grew and shrank in the same manner and if he had laid himself down on the ground in a straight north to south direction he would have been 180 kilometers long.

He stood looking to the north and watched the northern sea shrink to a small puddle. He saw the coast of the northern continent appear out of the red twilight, and the buildings of the great city, standing on the rocks above the coast, rise over the horizon. He saw the red-glowing water of a river plunge over a falls and into the sea. He saw it all, even though according to the map it was 4,000 kilometers away.

He noticed that the city buildings were beginning to become transparent as he watched and he feared that they would disappear completely if the foreshortening ratio increased much more.

When the air pressure had climbed to 100 atmospheres and the distance to the city was only a few more meters, a warning device inside his spacesuit sounded an alarm. He called to Tompetch, telling him to bring out the forcefield generators. Just as Tompetch answered, Bell saw that the mountain on the northern sea's south coast, which he had observed previously, would not 'shrink past' him but rather would strike him with its eastern flank. The mountain was not huge by any means but its gently descending eastern flank was wide enough to rob Bell of all hope that he could still get out of its way. He remained where he was, fascinated by the sight of a mountain coming at him, and waited to see what would happen. He could see the reddish light radiating from the sky even through the mountain's mass. The mountain might have been some kilometers thick in its natural form but now with a foreshortening factor of 1:1,000,000 it had shrunk to an equal number of millimeters. Bell was startled to suddenly realize that the shrinking process in which Wanderer had fallen might not necessarily have an effect on the molecular forces of matter and that the mountain side, though not only a few millimeters thick, might be just as hard to break through as before.

But he had no more time to move out of the way. He looked around and found Lt. Tompetch climbing out of the hatch. Tompetch had both small generators affixed to his belt and moved easily and without difficulty under the protection of the forcefield. Bell, on the other hand, had the feeling of turning his head inside a bowl of pudding. Pudding more or less described the increased air density, he thought. He called to Tompetch: "Look out for the mountain! It's coming right at us!"

He saw Tompetch focus on the unexpected obstacle, then turned once more to face his destiny eye to eye as a man should.

The mountain had approached within a few centimeters—a flat facade of rock, a hair-thin wall. In reality, the mountain was not coming towards Reginald Bell but rather Bell was growing towards the mountain.

Bell bent forward to catch the impact on his shoulder.

He felt a stabbing pain in his right shoulder. For a moment he believed the collision could crush his bones but then he triumphantly discovered a rent in the stone wall. He bent back again, cursing the viscous air that prevented him from moving with any speed, then threw himself forward once more. This time the pain of impact was less. Bell heard a sound that seemed like the whimpering of a dog. At the same moment the tear in the wall widened and spread and the wall was ripped in two and began to fall. The pieces of rubble were so flat that Bell could hardly recognize them as such any more. All that remained of the mountain flank was a glowing dust that quickly settled to the ground.

And in the mountain yawned a hole that was at least three times wider than Bell himself. Bell stared up at the wall which in spite of its thinness towered more than 200 meters into the air and he was satisfied with his work. The wall had been split into two parts and under normal circumstances Bell would have been fatally crushed under the falling rocks and debris. But rocks and debris that were only thousandths of millimeters thick instead of the original meters could not affect him.

He looked back at Tompetch again. Mike stood still. He had not needed to take any risks. His forcefield did for him what Bell had needed his shoulder to do. At the moment of impact Tompetch threw himself forward —and then there were two holes in the rock wall.

Minutes later the mountain reached the spaceboat. Bell had no apprehensions: the Gazelle was a million times more stable than he was. The mountain broke apart when it hit the craft.

Bell tried to imagine what was happening at that moment on Wanderer itself—there where the shadowy inhabitants of this world were a part of the shrinking and thus did not notice it. They would see three shapeless figures: poles kilometers long that were actually two men, and a figure several 100

kilometers long which was a Gazelle-type scout. These figures were in swift and constant growth, running through whatever stood in their way: trees, shrubs, buildings and, finally, even mountains. At that moment chaos had to be reigning on Wanderer. Each movement of the three monsters must call forth a storm of gigantic proportions. Trees, which they had not already knocked over, would be uprooted by the storms and blown away. If there were people here, they too would be carried off. The sea began to boil.

And they themselves, the three monsters, noticed nothing of it. For them a tree, for example, with a span of 10 meters, was a figure 100th of a millimeter deep. Be it however broad or high, for them it was no more than a shadowy figure which they did not even feel as they went through it.

Reginald Bell stood motionless for a few moments. The thought of what destruction he was wreaking struck him for the first time It relieved him only a little to remember that most of the creatures on Wanderer were shadow-beings which It, the master of Wanderer, could recreate as he chose. Nothing was lost if they were hit with a tree or a rock fall, for their lives were just as much shadows as their bodily existence.

Mike Tompetch's calm voice pulled him out of his brooding. "Your generator, sir. The air pressure has gone up to 120 atmospheres."

Bell tried to turn but he was barely able to complete the movement. Tompetch noticed his difficulties and came closer. Frightened Bell realized that within a few more minutes he might not have been able even to stretch out his hand to seize the offered generator. The air was more viscous than ever.

He laboriously fastened the generator to his belt and turned it on. At that moment a heavy burden which had piled up on his shoulders unnoticed seemed to fall away. He moved his right-arm as a test and found he no longer had any difficulties with it.

Meanwhile, behind the mountain the northern sea had come into view. The tips of Reginald Bell's boots extended past the coastline. On the other side of the small pool which the sea had become, reared the steep cliffs of the northern continent. The city was now only a flat shadow. Bell was convinced that he would no longer even be able to see it when the shrinking had increased to the point he could cross the northern sea with a single step.

He had just started to consider how he could cross over without damaging the city when he heard someone calling him. Surprised, he whirled around and looked at Tompetch who was standing quietly by and looking out across the narrow sea. Moreover, Bell remembered that it had not been Tompetch's voice which he had heard. "What the—" he muttered in irritation.

At that moment he heard the voice for a second time. "John Marshall here! Can you hear me, Mr. Bell?"

Bell suddenly began to laugh. He turned his head as though he could see Marshall somewhere and answered: "It's about time you guys showed up!"

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Along with the monster growing out of the south were two others. one of the latter pair looked just like the thing radiating Reginald Bell's thoughts; and as it came close enough, Marshall saw that it was Mike Tompetch. The third thing did not think at all. Although its original form could no longer be made out, Marshall did not doubt that it was the Gazelle with which Bell and Tompetch had arrived on Wanderer.

That which had so greatly shaken John Marshall was accepted with astonishing calmness by the others. Atlan the Arkonide only cleared his throat and commented: "Well, yes, we had to figure on something like that happening, didn't we? This planet is turning through an area of instability where the coordinate axes of its space are variously subject to foreshortening. Someone living in that zone naturally notices nothing of the phenomenon. Evidently going through the teletransmitter to get here made us a part of this semispace. Wanderer looks normal to us. We don't notice the fact that it has no more contact with the normal universe.

"It's different for Bell and Tompetch. They have landed on a part of Wanderer that at the time of their landing had reentered normal space. They have remained a part of normal space and are experiencing the full effect of the strange phenomena on Wanderer. And through them we can see what is really happening on Wanderer." He looked at Perry Rhodan. "It would be good, I think, if we could transmit some instructions to Bell. He's clever enough to get the idea that in a few minutes or so—half an hour or less,

anyway—he'll need to take only I step to reach Its city. If he isn't already there, that is. I think he should then—"

Perry Rhodan interrupted him in the middle of a sentence with a sudden burst of activity. "How is the connection, Marshall?" he asked. "Can you read his thoughts clearly?"

"Pretty well, sir," Marshall answered. "But he thinks somewhat more slowly."

"Good. Try to reach him!"

John Marshall switched on his minicom and tried to find Bell's altered frequency. He no longer saw how the ghastly figure outside continued to grow—how Reginald Bell to the left and Tompetch and the Gazelle to the right extended past Rhodan's ship and pressed onwards to the south. He called out: "Come in, Mr. Bell!"

He sensed Bell's surprise and then, when he had called again, he heard the answer: "It's about time you guys showed up!"

At the same moment someone behind Marshall cried out: "Tell him to be more careful with his movements! Every time he turns his head a hurricane blows over the land."

Marshall opened his eyes in surprise and looked at the vidscreen. The image of park landscape had changed. Thick dust clouds blew along at terrific speed. Branches, limbs and even entire trees appeared, whirling here and there, and then disappeared once more in the dust. It was hard to imagine that Reginald Bell had caused this storm with a single movement of his head.

Marshall transmitted the instructions word for word. Bell promised from now on he would not move. Then Marshall turned to Rhodan for further orders.

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Bell heard his instructions as follows: "There must be some sort of station in the city that supplies the planet wirelessly with energy. That much is certain. Try to find this station and set it into operation—or if it already is

operating, reset its transmitter so that a maximum of energy is being beamed at our landing site. Our engines have been drained of energy by some inexplicable force: we don't have any more left for our power units. If, however, we can tap the power station, we'll be all right. Do you understand?"

"Yes," Bell replied. "It seems to me you're talking rather fast but everything is clear. You haven't overlooked my little problem, have you? I mean, how can I find a power station when the whole building is only 1,000th of a millimeter thick and how can I manipulate any controls when my finger's 50 kilometers long?"

"Wait a minute," said Marshall. "I'll relay that." After a few seconds he reported back. "The shrinking will soon reach its maximum. Then it'll go the other way. You'll reach your normal size again—or rather Wanderer will return to the scale marked on the map. Then it'll be time to act. Work fast and remember that at the moment your rate of time is about 1/3rd of Wanderer's. The factor is not constant: it could change... in either direction."

"OK," Bell answered, trying to think at a faster speed. "Tell me one more thing: how much time do we have left?"

"Our figure is 21 hours," said Marshall. "It's 03:00 now and the date is May 1st!"

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The time had come. The northern sea was just a small puddle—no more than half a meter wide. Bell needed to take only one more step and he would stand on the northern continent.

But he hesitated to take that step. He knew what commotion he would cause in the atmosphere if he moved his 1,000 kilometer-long body.

He raised his right foot slowly. He had taken careful note of the place where the city stood. He could no longer see it because its buildings had shrunk to figures of so little depth they were imperceptible. But he felt certain that he would do them no damage. At least not directly. What the storm he was causing would do to them he could not say.

Mike Tompetch moved at the same time. Just as slowly as Bell he raised his foot, shifted his body weight to the left leg and bent gradually forward. Then, as his center of gravity was located about over the middle of the sea, he began to set his right foot down. That was the dangerous moment. He could no longer hold himself upright on his left leg and had to bring his foot down more quickly than he had wanted. He looked guiltily at Bell but he'd had no better luck. They had both lost their balance at the same time. The storm that now raged over Wanderer must have been enormous.

Carefully they drew their left leg after. Since they were standing securely on their right foot, they had no further problems. The storm that resulted from this movement was only a murmuring breeze in comparison to the end-of-the-world-sized hurricane the too quick setting down of the right foot had called forth.

Bell turned slowly to the side and in so doing his shoulders grew in width and knocked a few mountains out of the way. Mike Tompetch turned as well.

Out of the corner of his eye—since he did not dare even turn his head—Reginald Bell saw the Gazelle standing on the other side of the narrow sea. It was still close enough that he could have touched it by stretching out his arm but when the shrinking reversed it would soon be 4,000 kilometers away.

"We're about five kilometers west of the city," he said to Tompetch. "We'll have to walk a little. As you know, the foreshortening works from north to south. From east to west, the proportions remain the same. Move carefully! We don't have any time to lose, true, but we don't want to wreck Wanderer, either. If we take two hours to reach the city, then we'll have reached a reasonable compromise. Let's go!"

They started to move. They did not lift their feet far off the ground and they slid across the grass. The ground gradually ascended, reaching the level of the cliffs on which the city stood about three kilometers ahead.

Bell looked north once. He saw that his left shoulder seemed to be flattened in. The sight was astonishing. It looked as though the shoulder joint was simply missing. Yet he felt no pain and since he was still in

possession of his left arm it was certainly nonsense to assume that the apparition was authentic.

He thought about it and found the explanation rather quickly. His left shoulder was pressing against the protective forcefield that domed over the planet's flat surface. The field was the boundary between semispace and normal space. All effects of the distortion ended there in the north where the field rose from the ground.

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Never before had Perry Rhodan seen a more grotesque picture. The two poles that in reality were Reginald Bell and Mike Tompetch moved in bizarre fashion. The right side split off. A tear appeared and what was to the right of the tear glided slowly upwards. Nevertheless the atmosphere was agitated into fury. Within seconds a storm developed that was even more violent and destructive than the one Rhodan and his companions had experienced an hour before. The separated section of the pole went off into the north, giving the storm a new direction. What the two giant figures then did became lost in the dust. But when they came to rest and the storm began to die down, their southern end, which had been at the waiting Gazelle, had moved farther north.

Perry Rhodan had arranged for the event to be filmed. Infrared camera attachments made sure that movements hidden by the storm-driven dust-clouds from the eyes of the human viewers were recorded on film.

Immediately thereafter the storm began again. The poles were turning. For a moment they were out of sight, then in their places appeared completely new figures. They were narrower than the poles and seemed at first to consist only of a piece of material floating about 1.8 meters above the ground. Then it was realized that the free-floating object represented the southernmost extent of some sort of wall which curved farther to the north the more closely it approached the ground.

In reality it was a side-view of Reginald Bell and Mike Tompetch. The overhanging object was the shoulder of their spacesuits. Both men's heads were out of sight.

That meant Bell and Tompetch had turned toward the west. Moments later they started to move again and the storm which had faded in the meantime flared up again for the third time. It was most confusing to see two apparently disembodied shoulders hanging in the air and moving jerkily towards the west—at a speed that seemed ridiculous compared with the size of the two figures.

Perry Rhodan looked at the clock.

They had 19 hours left.

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During the journey to the city the foreshortening had hit its maximum and began to reverse itself. Reginald Bell noted with some surprise that the expansion process proceeded at a greater rate than had the foreshortening. He explained the phenomenon with the thought that it had only the name in common with a rotation in normal space. If the time-axis also took part in the turning, then in spite of any uninvolved observer, ½ of an event might appear considerably shorter than the other.

But however it was, after an hour and a half had passed since they began their crossover to the northern continent, the city began to grow visible to their eyes. The formerly unimaginably shrunken thinness of the buildings expanded, reflected light again and thus at length could be perceived by the two Earthmen. After another ½ hour had gone by, when they stood at the edge of the city the northern sea was again so broad that they could no longer see their Gazelle and a few moments later the northern sea's southern coastline disappeared from view.

Even so, they were still too broad-shouldered to enter the city. The streets were not wide enough for them. They had to wait.

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At the same time, Nathan reached the city after wandering for a long time. He looked around and found it at the same time impressive and depressing. His longing for his friend and the other strangers, and his

feeling of loneliness, had increased almost to the level of panic. Nathan had become convinced that his existence as an astral form would come to a quick end if help did not arrive soon.

He landed on the great central plaza of the city and waited. There was nothing and no one for him to converse with.

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Reginald Bell did not know what time of day it was when the expansion had progressed to the point where he and Tompetch could enter the city. He only knew that they had to hurry. They had to find the power station as quickly as possible.

Bell tried to reach Marshall again. He called his name at short intervals, hoping that enough mental energy would be concentrated in his calls to attract Marshall's attention. He wanted to know in what part of the city he should look for the power station. But he had no more success. Marshall was now in semispace and he and Tompetch had remained in normal space. That fact alone cut off any connection, unless the spatial distance was small enough that the barrier could be broken through—as had been the case before.

Finally Tompetch pointed out a building rearing tower-high into the reddish sky. Its domed roof was studded with odd shapes that in Tompetch's opinion were directional antennae. Bell decided he was right and they turned their steps in the building's direction.

The entrance to the tower faced the west. Bell's shoulders were still too wide for him to go in the usual way. So he turned sideways and stepped in, right shoulder forward.

The number of machines, conveyor belts and antigravity shafts which greeted his eyes on the tower's first floor confused him for some time. He needed a quarter of an hour just to guess their function by their shapes and the sort of connections they used.

He identified the huge alternating current generators, the connections from the massive conductors leading straight up to the top of the tower, and

finally, a sort of control board that seemed capable of regulating the activity of the vast machine complex.

On the inclined face of the panel he found besides a confusing number of switches, buttons and without exception unlighted instrument lamps, a single lever impossible to overlook. It was marked with only two symbols, neither of which Bell could read. But he knew from frequent experience that two symbols inscribed by a master switch, one at either end, usually mean ON and OFF. He tipped the lever forward and to his satisfaction a series of lamps began to light up. At the same time, the vidscreen built into the horizontal section of the control panel showed an image that looked like a relief map. In a few moments Bell saw that in fact it was one. He began to turn other knobs and finally found one coupled with the vidscreen. When he moved it the map glided past the screen and it required only a little practice before Reginald Bell had the landing place of Rhodan's Gazelle precisely in the middle of the screen.

"We can start!" he said dryly to Mike Tompetch.

Then he shoved his helmet down over his back so he would be freer to move his head. The air pressure was hardly more than normal.

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Its laughter resounded once more. "You've done it yet again, my friend!" It told Rhodan. "It was interesting for me to see how you would go about it. I must admit that you had luck on your side!"

Perry Rhodan understood instantly. If It said he had done it, then that could only mean that Reginald Bell had succeeded in finding the power station and setting it into operation.

Our chances were small, he thought, but we did it!

He sat down in the pilot's seat as Its laughter began all over again, which only showed how much It had enjoyed the affair. Rhodan pulled down the master switch and saw that all the lights were burning. All of them, even the one for energy supply to the engines.

Rhodan did not hesitate. He activated the engines and noted in satisfaction how the Gazelle lifted into the sky. The landscape on the

vidscreen sank past. Nothing had been seen for some time of the three monstrous figures that had been Bell, Tompetch and their Gazelle.

Even after the Gazelle had taken off and sped towards the north at a velocity of Mach 6,It was still laughing. The protective forcefields began to have their effect. The air molecules were agitated into glowing. An aura of glowing red light surrounded the spacecraft.

"And you yet will experience your greatest surprise..."It said. Then the connection was broken off.

Rhodan did not give the hint any especial attention. It was only important to him that he reach the city on the coast of the northern continent, nothing more.

The time was 14:45. Remaining were only 10 hours in which to insure immortality.

The sky had become brighter as Reginald Bell and Mike Tompetch left the tower to make their way to the plaza at whose edge stood the Great Hall.

"That's odd," Bell said thoughtfully to Tompetch. "Do you remember that this happened once before, right when we made our crash landing?"

Tompetch nodded. Yes, he remembered. Before it had been so dark that they could hardly see their hands in front of their faces. After their emergency, landing they had suddenly a good range of vision and now it was as bright out as an overcast winter's day on Earth.

They walked through the silent streets of the gigantic city. It was dead and deserted—with the exception of the figure which suddenly appeared from the shadow of a building just as they turned onto the avenue that led to the plaza. Reginald Bell recognized him—the man with the dirty, broad-brimmed Stetson, the torn vest, the drooping gun belt, the greasy trousers and the dangling chaparejos.

The man stepped into their path, both thumbs jerked into his belt, and grinned at them. "Howdy, gents!" he exclaimed, and Bell could even remember the unmistakable Texas drawl which he had heard once more than 60 years before, almost in the same place. "What's your hurry? You know this town very well? Seen it a few times before myself. Looks funnier

every time I come back. Never knew such a funny-lookin' place laid twixt Dodge and Wichita. Got any idea how far 'tis to Wichita? I got a hankerin' to go there for a spell."

Bell smiled wryly and answered: "38 miles, stranger. What happened to your horse?"

The cowboy looked disgusted. "Got shot out from under me by the redskins. Been lookin' for a new one but where do you find one around here in the devil's own hometown? 38 miles... holy smoke! That'll cost me two days at least. But Wichita..." With that his eyes opened wide. "...Wichita is a place worth goin' to, no matter how much time it takes. Ever hear of Wichita Red?"

"Of course," said Bell truthfully, for he had read all about Wichita Red's heroic deeds as immortalized in the Wild West storybooks of his childhood. "He cleaned the town up, right?"

"Right, pardner! Just what he's doin'. And I'm on my way to help him!"

At that he disappeared, as though he had never existed. Reginald Bell glanced at the astonished expression on Tompetch's face, then went on. Tompetch followed.

A few minutes later they reached the plaza. The door to the Great Hall stood wide open. No energy curtain was in sight.

The plaza was empty. Bell sat down on the pavement in the center and turned away so he would not have to look at the open doorway. The temptation was great. He did not know what time it was. He did not know when the time finally ran out. He only knew that he wanted to enter the Physiotron only once Perry Rhodan had already received his cell renewal treatment. He was the second man in the Solar Imperium and he did not want to be any more. Rhodan was first!

Mike Tompetch's cares were fewer. He walked along the plaza and looked intently up at the building. He was on Wanderer for the first time and this world was filled with mysteries. Bell did not pay any attention to him. He remained where he was until he heard the whistling noise of the approaching Gazelle coming in towards the city after crossing the sea from the south. He stood up and raised his hand in greeting as the small spacecraft landed on the plaza.

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Perry Rhodan entered the Physiotron at 16:00 hours on May 1, 2042. When he had stepped through the door of the Great Hall, the robot Homunk had appeared from somewhere in the depths of the building and conducted him to the device. Homunk could give no information if the strange situation in which Wanderer found itself would have any effect on the results of the cell renewal process. And if Homunk did not know, it could be assumed that It, his master, was Itself facing a mystery.

Perry Rhodan's treatment was completed at 17:24 hours. Then Homunk spent some time working on the machinery that supplied the Physiotron with power, and finally it was Reginald Bell's turn to be treated. In the meantime Bell had been thinking over on his own what effect Wanderer's presence in semispace could have on the results of the cell renewal. He had not come to any conclusions. Or at least what he finally decided was most probable, could not be called a conclusion: that in a situation like this the cell renewal process could not guarantee any prevention of cell deterioration. It was different for Rhodan: by virtue of his transmitter leap he belonged to the same continuum as Wanderer. For him Wanderer had suffered no change. The sky was blue and the artificial sun shone like it did years before. Reginald Bell, however, had remained in normal space. For him Wanderer was a weird and uninviting world. It found itself in another spatial realm entirely. Did that mean the cell renewal would have no effect on him?

He felt pleased to note that the reaction of his body to the treatment was the same as it was 62 years before. He felt the harsh pain of dematerialization and had, as he later left the Physiotron, the impression that only a few seconds had gone by since his treatment had begun. However the clock showed 19:30 hours when he left the machine.

Perry Rhodan came toward him and wordlessly shook his hand. Joy lit up his eyes. "We've done it, Reggie," he said finally, "for another 62 years."

Bell raised his eyebrows. "Have we?" he asked sceptically. "Are you sure that it worked the way it should?"

Rhodan looked around for the robot but Homunk had meanwhile vanished into the depths of the hall. "No, I'm not sure," he answered honestly. "But we can take precautions."

Bell looked up in surprise. "Precautions?"

"Right. Our time is up in 4½ hours. According to what Homunk told us, the cell decay should be noticeable right after midnight if the renewal didn't take effect. We'll stay here. We'll set up camp next to the Physiotron. As soon as we detect the first signs of decay..."

"Aha!" Bell exclaimed. "I understand!" He became suddenly happy and clapped Rhodan heartily on the back. "That's a great idea, old pal!"

• • •

After waiting in the plaza for a few hours for something to happen—and nothing did—Nathan had decided to wander through the city. He glided through the streets and looked up at the huge buildings with astonishment. He felt that even his friend's vast spaceship would seem homey if he ever got back to it; as strange and unfamiliar as the spaceship might have seemed, the city was even more so.

In his confusion Nathan did not notice that a spaceboat had landed on the great plaza. He continued through the city and returned to the plaza only once the large artificial sun was in the process of fading out.

• • •

Perry Rhodan and Reginald Bell stood in front of the Gazelle and stared up at the sky.

"I can see only redness," Bell said. "No sun and nothing else."

Rhodan laughed gently. "Alright, I can't even see the sun myself. It's already behind the buildings. But the sky is blue, as usual."

He stretched out his hand and touched Bell's shoulder. He had already touched Bell several times before but he wanted to be certain that his fingers felt the plastic of the spacesuit and not something else.

"Odd," he said reflectively. "We're in two different continuums. You've stayed behind in the Einstein universe while I'm in the same semispace as Wanderer. You see the sky as dark red,I see it as bright blue. And yet we can converse with one another, see each other and even touch."

Reginald Bell was silent.

"It looks," Rhodan went on after a bit, "as if organic life is able to overstep certain natural limits. A mystery which we'll have to..."

He stopped when he saw the shadowy shape glide out of one of the streets opening on the plaza. He watched with astonishment as the transparent cloud formed a human figure and floated towards him.

"Nathan!" Rhodan exclaimed. "Well, what do you know—Nathan's back!"

At the same moment Its laughter rolled out over the plaza. It came so suddenly that Rhodan was startled. "Watch out!" warned the powerful voice. "Now it happens!"

Rhodan saw Nathan's astral form disappear through the open hatchway into the Gazelle. Reginald Bell took a surprised step forward and asked: "What does It mean? What—"

He did not have a chance to finish his sentence. The cataclysm took place suddenly and unexpectedly.

Bell felt himself knocked to the side as though kicked by a giant. For some seconds he felt the same harsh pain of dematerialization as he had inside in the Physiotron. He did not know what was going on around him. It was dark and he could not make any use of his eyes. He was deathly afraid. He waited for something to happen that would tear him to pieces.

But instead the pain suddenly melted away. It grew bright around him. He lay on the ground of the great plaza, staring up into a sky as blue as the Arizona sky in summer. And at the zenith stood Wanderer's artificial sun.

• • •

"I knew about it some seconds before it happened," said Atlan, smiling. "But I didn't have enough time left to tell you, Administrator."

Perry Rhodan nodded. He felt exhausted by the terrible pain that had torn at him for a few seconds—the same type of pain he had felt when the Gazelle entered the field of the teletransmitter.

Atlan sensed the unspoken request. "I said right from the beginning that the semispace in which this planet found itself was a highly unstable thing. One slight shock was all that was necessary to make up for the instability and push Wanderer permanently into either the 4th or the 5th dimensional continuums.

"Well, it happened. Wanderer has returned to normal space. We've had radio contact with the Drusus for several minutes now. It stands no more than 10 light-minutes from Wanderer. The return into normal space cost us 1½ days, certainly not as much as our flight into semispace. It's now May third, nine o'clock in the morning."

He looked around and met the impatience on all the faces with mocking laughter. "We'll understand things more easily if we consider that the difference between two differently dimensioned spaces is basically the difference in energy content. We can make a little experiment ourselves: we can create a small, closed space, a 4-dimensional continuum balloon and pump it full of energy. When we've done that long enough, the balloon will disappear. It will have gone into hyperspace.

"The outcome is not really all that clear. If at the beginning we made a hyperspace balloon and pumped it full of energy, we don't know what direction it would move. It could go into a 6-dimensional continuum just as easily as it could return to the status of normal space. The results would be a matter of statistics: you could not predict the outcome of a single case.

"The energy Wanderer's semispace needed to make the transition was rather small, considering its instability. The energy was obtained from the engines of the two Gazelles. Mr. Bell's engines were drained while he was flying his spaceboat northwards over the equatorial ocean. Our engines lost their energy while crossing over to this space in the transport field of the teletransmitter.

"One more thing: Mr. Bell could have seen that semispace was increasing its energy content but he did not know how to read the signs. He

saw the sky suddenly grow brighter when our Gazelle reached Wanderer, a clear sign that semispace was augmenting its energy."

"Moreover: the energy absorbed from the engines was not enough to carry out the transition completely. A slight amount still lacked. A part of this amount came from the power station, with which Mr. Bell made our Gazelle capable of flight again. The total amount of radiated power would have been enough to tear Wanderer apart but semispace soaked up the greatest portion—Mr. Bell has already reported a 1r6law, right?—the rest was just enough for our engines to operate again."

"In conclusion: the energy requirements for the changeover were almost fulfilled. A slight amount was still necessary, a few watt-seconds, to top it off. And who supplied that? Nathan! When he re-entered his body, exhausted from all his exertions, he left behind on this world the stabilizing energy he used to keep his astral form going. Those were the few watt-seconds Wanderer needed. The pent-up energy was discharged. The unstable structure became stable and Wanderer went back into normal space."

"That's the whole story, or at least qualitatively. We'll work it out completely when we understand the theory of semispace well enough."

He turned and smiled at Ali el Jagat. Jagat answered with a brief wink.

Perry Rhodan stood up. He took a step and stumbled over Nathan's seacow-like body. Nathan made no secret of his joy at having found his friends again. He wriggled on the floor and emitted high-pitched sounds of happiness—which no one could hear because they were beyond the range of human ears.

Rhodan looked at the vidscreen. 20 meters in front of the Gazelle gaped the tall opening of the door that led into the Great Hall. "What a strange world this is," he murmured.

But stranger worlds lay in his future.

DEATH WAITS IN SEMISPACE

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THE SHIP OF THINGS TO COME

10,000 YEARS into the past.

To legendary Atlantis, island named for an ancient Arkonide you have come to know and love: Time's Lonely One... the Crystal Prince.

While Rhodan and Bell are busy seeking their boon of another life-boost from the infuriatingly playful mass-intelligence known as It , dweller on the manufactured Planet Wanderer, Atlan returns in memory to his young manhood among the Atlanteans.

When something unexpected happens that alarms PUCKY for the safety of Perry and Reg, Atlan returns to be on the present scene.

But in the meantime we will have seen a sight never before beheld by the eyes of 20th (or 21st) Century human beings, the unique, exciting event of:

THE LAST DAYS OF ATLANTIS

by K.H. Scheer

amazing stories of the late 20s, reaching the screen 30 years later but not too late to entertain audiences yet unborn when Gernsback was in flower. In the crude old days we had the monthly menace that seemingly couldn't be stopped but penultimately was and the world was saved for another 4 weeks for scientifiction, and my very real regret in these crude new days of Earth-in-peril pix is that the authors who pioneered—Hamilton, Cummings, Keller, Williamson, Starzl, even John Russell Fearn —are not reaping the yellow harvests of Hollywood gold rather than the Odd-Johnnies-Come-Lately who do the "original" stories.

THE BLOB is a voracious gob of carnivorous goo that arrives via meteor express on the outskirts of a small town in Pennsylvania and ingests its way victim by victim into the heart of the community. There it puts in an impersonal appearance at a midnight Spook Show, devouring the movie operator just as he is projecting the final frightening reel of DAUGHTER OF HORROR, a mythical Bela Lugosi film co-billed with (also imaginary) THE VAMPIRE & THE ROBOT. People generally like jello and this switch on jello liking people is novel enough for the general public to eat it up. The Blob itself, in color, is convincingly realistic, and while it is not destroyed but only frozen into inactivity, a sequel seems unlikely unless Son of Blob melts the polar ice onto which his pop has been parachuted.

1975 Note: BEWARE! THE BLOB was back in 1972.

250 ADVENTURES FROM NOW
You'll see strange sights on
The Phantom Transmitter

Shock Short

PERRY RHODAN introduces a New Talent in—

NATIVE TALENT
by
King Akers

My Dear Yizmarr,

Matters are progressing smoothly now, so I can take time out to make this tape. I'd better, if I want to get it on the ship leaving soon for home. By the time you get this, the project should be finished.

The Earthmen are being very cooperative. Just as predicted. At first, of course, they reacted typically. Fear, anger, hostility—the usual feelings when we move into a new solar system.

Odd, though. Their reasons, I mean. Natives usually resent having strangers in their territory because of greed over what they consider their property. Even when they haven't developed interplanetary flight natives resent someone else occupying their neighbor worlds.

But these humans—that's the name for the dominant animal life—reacted against us for our physical appearance more than anything else. They even fight each other over the color of their skin.

Can you imagine such an infantile attitude? We aren't that much different. They're bipeds like us but shorter and thinner. Fragile, almost. Their skin is soft and, in most cases, quite pale. They have a lower animal called a rhinoceros; its skin is much like ours.

Anyway, when our first ship orbited Earth and made video contact someone down there actually launched a nuclear missile. It was easily deflected in such a manner

that the humans understood we could have returned it to one of their cities. Then they were willing to talk with us.

Naturally we had to waste a few days with volunteers of their race while pretending to learn their major language with teaching machines. It would have been very unwise to tell them about our spy station on their moon, where we've been watching them for several generations.

Then we told them we wanted to establish a military base on their planet. Imagine their thoughts: these strange-looking aliens want to set up military operations in our home? Yes, that was their attitude, even though they didn't say it directly to us. But we listened to secret radio and telephone conversations.

We explained how we needed a base of operations for the interstellar war expanding in their direction. The humans have barely begun space flight to their only satellite but they understand the logistics problems of trying to supply fighting forces far from home.

The only practical method is to establish supply and maintenance bases among intelligent races. Someone who has the industrial ability to manufacture supplies, ranging from food to weapons and spaceships.

Well! You can imagine how they wiggled their antennae at that. (The expression doesn't really apply here since they don't have antennae. But you get the idea.) It happened this way: offer a primitive race the chance to get their hands on interstellar ships and they'll risk getting involved in someone else's war.

We didn't even have to point out the precedent. One social and governmental group called Americans recalled how they had done the same thing during one of their wars against another group. They set up bases on islands in the South Seas, using native talent for labor.

They must resent being on the level of those primitive

natives compared to us but they and we tactfully avoid mentioning that. Anyway, they'll put up with a lot for the advancements they hope to make. Their medicine has already improved tremendously with the help we've given them. We want them to be healthy, of course.

So much for background, dear. It's becoming a familiar pattern, anyway. Oh, yes! Speaking of patterns, I've noticed that their clothing is starting to look like ours and I've found some items I'm sure you'll love. I'll bring souvenirs when I return home.

Well, we have our base. It's ideally situated. Several hundred square miles of desert where the weather is almost perfect for us. In the area called the United States, where their technology seems most advanced. That was a great help in building the base, which is already becoming a city.

We explained that our families, clerical staffs and technicians will be coming here along with the military men for rest and recreation. The humans are looking forward to meeting our people. They're especially looking forward to entering the Keelug Empire, as we promised.

Besides the base we've started production at 3 factories: 2 for ships, 1 for weapons and mining machinery. The humans realize that the other planets will have to be mined for metal and reactor fuel. They don't yet realize that they're building cargo ships, not warships.

It's amusing to watch their frustration when they can't understand how many items function. Things like engines and guns. They don't know that the plans deliberately omit essential parts that will be added later. This way they can't build extras to use against us when the day of awakening comes.

And what an awakening it will be. They'll enter the Keelug Empire just as 4 other races have. As slaves.

Another solar system enters our control, with abundant native talent to mine the planets and operate the factories and provide domestic labor.

The initial rebellion and death rate shouldn't be too high. Military and political leaders of nearly every local government have visited us and have been conditioned to obey us. And we'll place a few hundred conditioned workers at factories to serve as unknowing spies and informers.

I still get satisfaction from a smooth takeover of this sort, even if it is sneaky. But it's the only practical way to conduct an interstellar invasion. Simply use local talent to manufacture our needs. It costs us almost nothing in money or personnel. Or lives. And that's the most important——

I'm back. There was a call. A minor technical problem at a new hospital. I'll have to see to it. Unhealthy slaves don't work hard.

My love to you and the children.

Your loving husband,
Bredhun

300 ADVENTURES FROM NOW
You'll witness
The Dolan Hunt

In his monumental work The History of Civilization, *the late Dr. E. E. Smith traces the consequential and salient events of the war between two diametrically opposed philosophies, that of Boskone and that of Civilization. To that work, complete and thorough, nothing need be added. It stands, and will continue to stand, as the single most complete effort of its kind ever attempted and successfully executed.*

On numerous occasions Dr. Smith was urged to add to this work a series of minor incidents illuminating and filling certain gaps in his chronicle made necessary by the lack of space to include them. The bulk of material far exceeds any hope of its exhaustion by a single author. Certainly the lives and efforts of men such as Wentworth, Dronvire and McQueen should not be forgotten. Each played a significant part in the development, indeed in one instance in the continued existence, of Civilization.

This then is one story played out against the background of a greater struggle. Minor only in the context of the other events depending upon it.

NEW LENSMAN

by
William P. Ellern

Part 1

Chapter 1

THE BLACK SPACESHIP

The wall slid slowly back revealing an executive conference room with its heavy wall drapery, upholstered furniture and simulated wood table. A tall, slender man in the uniform of the Solarian Patrol stood at the far end of the room, waiting. The group of men entered, obviously curious at the presence of the patrolman but not commenting on it. They quietly found their places at the conference table and sat down.

"Gentlemen," Ron Love, the Mayor of Copernicus, began the meeting. The Mayor of Copernicus was a man of ordinary height but quite stocky of build. His bright eyes penetrated each man of the group as he spoke, as though trying to perceive their thoughts. "The material to be discussed in this meeting is classified Top Secret. Consequently, I must insist that all of you who are using recording devices, turn them off."

There was a short pause as several men removed cases from their pockets and turned them off, while others merely touched various places on their person.

"Gentlemen," the Mayor began, when it was apparent that he again had the attention of the group. "This is Lt. Larry McQueen of the Solarian Patrol. The Lieutenant is a special courier from the Solarian Patrol Grand Fleet Headquarters in The Hill on Tellus. His message to the Board of Directors is the reason for this meeting being classified. If the material presented here seems extraordinary, so will be our response to it!"

"Lieutenant, these men are the Board of Directors of Copernicus." Mayor Love introduced Lt. McQueen around the conference table. Larry was already familiar with each of their backgrounds, having read their Service dossiers. When the social amenities were over he began.

"For at least the last two years our solar system has been under surveillance by some unknown, outside agency. Information about this has not been made public because of the limited amount of data available. Until recently each contact with this agency had been made visually by a Solarian Patrol spaceship while, for various reasons, it was not radiating energy. When our spaceship revealed its presence by using a tracer, or spy-ray, directed toward the other spaceship, it disappeared! After several such accidental encounters, a concerted effort was made to detect this agency.

"Approximately a year ago the Solarian Patrol started 'Project Light Post'. The announced purpose of this project was to englobe the Solar System, at the radius of Saturn, with a series of 12 unmanned, automatic navigation aids; beacons for interstellar flight. In addition to the publicized automatic positioning and communications equipment, there were special recorders on board the Light Post beacons using the light-field lenses developed by Dr. Kelvin here at your Moorpark Research Center. I have brought with me a special set of these recordings to show you."

The room darkened and on the wall behind Larry a picture of the planet Saturn with its rings appeared.

"The light sensors of Light Post No. 7 picked up a glint of light here," Larry continued, pointing to a little sparkle of light a few inches past the edge of Saturn. "A light-field recorder immediately focused on the area."

The picture zoomed in on the spot of light. As it grew larger, it changed into a black, teardrop-shaped spaceship.

"As you can see from the shape, this spaceship is unlike anything thus far built in the Solar System. Having found it, we followed it as it drifted inertialess into our system. It did not radiate, and its course implied an accurate knowledge of the location of charted detectors in our tracking network, as well as our manned stations and spacecraft. This in turn indicated that there is some continuous, covert contact between the entities operating this spaceship and our civilization."

Time-lapse pictures followed the spaceship into the Solar System.

"In the asteroid belt the spaceship used tractor beams to alter its course. Using the asteroids as a screen, it rapidly moved part way around the system. It also radiated for a short time as it recharged its accumulators from its generators.

"At this point the tracking of the spaceship was switched to Lamp Post No. 3," Larry said, and the view of the spaceship changed. "Here the spaceship apparently felt safe to leave the plane of the ecliptic. It approached an asteroid known as Icarus. Icarus is unique in that it is one of the few asteroids to cross the orbit of Tellus. The spaceship went inert. Note that the intrinsic velocity of the spaceship so closely matched that of the asteroid that it was able to land on tractor beams alone. A day later it again radiated for about an hour. The spaceship sat on

Icarus for a week. Then it went free and lifted off using pressors. When it got back to the asteriod belt, it switched to atomics and disappeared at light speeds." The pictures on the wall used time-lapse photography to follow Larry's words. The lights came back on.

"In the intervening months since this first spaceship was found, we have kept a watch on Icarus. During this time three space craft have landed there. As far as could be determined, each followed the same pattern. The last one we attempted to intercept, as is shown in the following sequence." The lights dimmed.

"You see here the spaceship lifting off from Icarus," Larry said. "Four cruiser class patrol ships were waiting for it about a detet* away, with all radiating equipment off. They followed it visually, and when it got within range, the patrol ships went into action."

On the wall the group of men saw four tractor beams clamp onto the black spaceship. A blast of incandescent gas appeared at the black spaceship's side as simultaneously activated planes of force attempted to sheer the tractor beams—unsuccessfully. These were not light tracers! They were hard-driven tractors clamped on with the full power of a patrol cruiser behind them!

"At the first touch of a tractor the black spaceship's screens went up. The atomic power system activated the Bergenholm and jets drove the spaceship sideways. In previous instances only the obvious line of flight had been searched when the spaceships vanished. This is why they seemed to disappear."

The four patrol cruisers closed in and linked together to form a tetrahedron about the black spaceship. The captive spaceship lashed out with its macro beams against

* Detet—The distance at which one spaceship can detect another. EES.

the spaceships holding it. The screens of the patrol cruisers flared a little but took it with ease. Then, with careful deliberation, the patrol attacked. The outer screen of the black spaceship went down as beams from the four cruisers overloaded it. The second one went down a minute later. The third screen was carefully brought up to a violet radiance, just short of being burned out by the opposing spacecraft.

"An estimate was made of the black spaceship's generating system based on the amount of radiation given off when they recharged their accumulators. It was estimated that it would require about four hours of intense overload on the screens before the generators of the black spaceship would burn out," Larry said. "At the end of five hours the third screen went down. Before the wall shield could be loaded, an atomic explosion completely destroyed the black spaceship. It was deliberate suicide."

The group watched as the black spaceship disappeared in an intense flare of light. The room lights came up.

"The expected response of an alien spaceship, when discovered in this manner and captured by overwhelming forces, is to surrender. In return, our response would be to give the inhabitants a tour of our system, escort them out of it and release them with the admonishment to 'go and spy no more'," Larry explained, and then smiled slowly. "This attitude may seem a little idealistic but the other party may claim sovereignty. If we damaged their subjects, or their property, they could demand reparations, if they didn't declare war. The only obvious conclusion to be reached by this 'rather die then be captured' attitude is that this unknown agency has serious intentions of aggression, the details of which we might discover by capturing them. Accordingly, we are alerting all the patrol bases and the major spaceports in the Solar System to prepare for an armed conflict. It may never

come but we must be prepared. I have given Mayor Love a general outline of the preparations which the Patrol would like to have made here at Copernicus and those additional tasks which a full scale effort will entail. He is in charge of all local activity," Lt. Larry McQueen concluded. "Are there any questions?"

"Yes," Linn Potter, Director of Services said. "Is the alert only in our solar system?"

"Yes, until signs of similar activity are discovered elsewhere," Larry answered. "Mr. Johnstone?"

"You mentioned that they seemed to have a knowledge of the location of our manned stations and spacecraft," the Director of Copernicus Control said. "Do you have any idea yet of the source of that information?"

"None. Mr. Turner?"

"How much time do we have to prepare for this enemy?"

"We have no concrete proof that these entities are 'enemies'," Larry answered. "We can only guess, based on what we have seen. This is one of the reasons why this information has not been released to either the press or the general public. Yes, they are watching us. Yes, they have been acting like they are considering a fight. BUT, until they perform some aggressive act, they are not enemies. We must also be careful not to accuse the next group of aliens who happen to venture into our solar system in a black, tear-drop shaped spaceship, of being spies or enemies or potential agressors.

"As to how much time we have to prepare," Larry continued, "I don't know. Maybe days. Maybe years. Mr. Sneary?"

"During the Jovian Wars several attempts were made to drop meteoroids on Copernicus. Is any protection available for a similar type of attack?"

"Yes, the new Rodebush-Bergenholm field," Larry an-

swered. "Rodebush-Bergenholm field generators will be available shortly. I'm not at liberty to say anything else at this time. Mr. Gold?"

"Will we act as a relay for communications, as we did during the Jovian Wars?" the Director of Earthside Communications asked.

"No. Your commercial facilities will probably not be required except on a routine basis. The Solarian Patrol will be using ultra-wave equipment. This spaceport will be expected first to defend itself, second to destroy any attacking spacecraft within its range and last to act as a cislunar spotter for Grand Fleet Headquarters," Larry answered. "Mr. Castora?"

"Could the black spaceship be a pirate?"

"Yes!" Larry said. "That is a definite probability. Certainly the battle to the death philosophy fits. However, consider the spaceship. It was of a design different from that of the Solar System or of any of the inhabited planets we know. If these are pirates, then they are the most dangerous pirates we've ever seen. They have the facilities of one or more worlds to produce their own fleet. If they are pirates, we still must prepare, perhaps more than ever. Are there any further questions? No? Then I'll turn the meeting back to Mayor Love."

"Thank you, Lt. McQueen," Ron Love said. He waited a few moments until Lt. McQueen sat down, and then continued waiting until he again had the attention of the group.

"In normal times Copernicus is a spaceport and a research center rather than a military base," he began. "The Gateway to Tellus we call ourselves. But even so we have a responsibility: We are responsible for all the activities in one of the four sectors of the moon through Copernicus Control and its orbiting observation relays. Through Copernicus Control we control most of the commercial

traffic in the solar system. We also exert direct military command over a large radius of the Lunar surface and half a million miles into space with our blaster batteries. *We are one of the primary lines of defense of Tellus!* That responsibility can weigh heavy."

Ron paused for a moment and then continued in a softer tone, an almost tired tone. "This information which Lt. McQueen has brought compels us to consider Copernicus as a military base under impending attack from an unknown foe. A state of war may soon exist! Our first concern is the general public. Our first assumption is that if the enemy attacks, they will first have infiltrated us and be prepared to sabotage or destroy our defenses, our air, our power and/or our water systems.

"I need from each of you a report," he said. "A list of the critical points of internal attack, which are under your control, and the procedures for protecting these essential systems or minimizing any damage that can be done to them. This report will be due in three days. Include everything you can think of, whether you have a solution to the problem or not. Mr. Johnstone, I also need from you, as Director of Copernicus Control, an evaluation of our external defenses and their weak points. My secretary will issue each of you an outline of the information required in your reports. They will be classified Top Secret as well as the information discussed here and the outline. Release only as little as possible to those members of your staff who have been cleared on this level, or from those from whom you specifically need help," Ron directed.

"If there are no further questions, the meeting of the Board of Directors of Copernicus will be adjourned," Mayor Ron Love concluded.

* * * *

Dr. Kelvin remained behind with Lt. McQueen and Mayor Love after the rest of the Board of Directors had left. At the Mayor's suggestion they went into his office.

The office of the Mayor of Copernicus showed his status. It was a plush place with thick carpets, draped walls and a large genuine wood desk imported from Tellus at one end. Behind the desk a three-dimensional television picture of the interior of Copernicus Crater covered the entire wall. One could see several spaceships being unloaded far below. In the distance was the top of the east peak on the other side of the crater 50 miles away. It was called Pelz Peak after one of the first men to enter the crater on foot. The three peaks in the center of the crater were, of course, named after the three astronauts who first landed there.

"OK, Ron. What's the real reason behind that Board Meeting?" Dr. Kelvin asked the Mayor after they were seated.

"What do you mean?"

"Of the people at that meeting, at least four had no business being there. Or if you want to be formal, they had no 'need to know' the information revealed. I'm certain you didn't invite them without a reason."

Mayor Love looked inquiringly at Lt. McQueen.

"Are the shields and blocks up around this room?" Larry asked.

"G-1?" Ron said.

"Yes, all the shields and spy-ray blocks are in operation," the office robot answered.

Lt. McQueen nodded to the Mayor to go on.

"We suspect that we have already been infiltrated, and are checking on the Board of Directors level," Ron Love answered. "The chairs in the conference room had lie detectors secretly installed by the last Mayor of Copernicus. I never bothered to have them removed. I hope both

of you realize how politically dangerous that fact is and will appreciate my position in telling you. During the meeting any significant changes in emotional levels were displayed on the plate in front of my seat. Our suspicions seem to have been borne out. One of the men at the meeting didn't turn off his personal recorder and practically went off scale when the words 'Icarus', 'pirates' and 'sabotage' were mentioned."

"Who was he?" asked Dr. Kelvin.

"John Griffin, Director of Facilities."

There was a long pause, which was finally broken by Dr. Kelvin. "We've been had! It's the one place we can't afford to have a . . . a traitor!"

The Mayor had to laugh at the look of utter consternation on Dr. Kelvin's face. "You're wrong," he said. "Almost any one of the Directors could be as dangerous. There are ways of checking Griffin's activities but that's a matter for myself and the Director of Security. Meanwhile, if you would take Lt. McQueen over to the research center, he will discuss the details of Project Hard Hat."

"Larry, if you'll check with the Director of Security when you're through with Dr. Kelvin, he'll bring you up to date on any immediate results of our research on Griffin."

"Good hunting, Ron," Lt. McQueen said as they left.

"Thanks," the Mayor answered.

350 ADVENTURES FROM NOW
You'll learn the reason for the
Crisis Conference

Chapter 2

A CHANGED MAN

In the hall outside the Mayor's office Lt. Larry McQueen and Dr. Kelvin stepped into the open Down shaft and dropped, free, through the City Hall Building to the travel tunnel level several hundred feet below. The travel tunnel level was an extension of the same inertialess field as in the shaft but in the horizontal direction. Currently there was a grid of 10 north-south and 5 east-west travel tunnels in Copernicus. Opening off them every hundred feet or so, a pair of shafts extended upwards.

Dr. Kelvin reached up. Immediately, a handle snapped into his cupped hand at over 50 miles per hour. He didn't feel it strike him—inertialess collisions cannot be felt but he was instantly drawn along by it. It might be thought that air resistance would cause one to travel in a horizontal position but this is not so when the air itself is inertialess. Sounds are also strange inside a travel tunnel because every sound travels instantly to all parts of it without attenuation and then stops without reverberation. Gravity is equalized in the travel tunnels and shafts. Some rather grim accidents had occurred in which external gravity caused all of the air in an inertialess field to fall to the floor. Artificial gravity fields were used in such a way that the air was forced to circulate rather than stagnate at the floor.

Lt. Larry McQueen followed Dr. Kelvin through the travel tunnels to the entrance of the Moorpark Research Center. There they went through a security check.

A few minutes later they were in Dr. Kelvin's office. It

was a great contrast from Mayor Love's. A large, slightly battered, metal desk, and one of the tables were piled high with notebooks, magazines, tapes and papers. Models of gadgets were scattered about the room. A drafting tank and a bookcase were behind the desk in easy reach. The only real concession to comfort was two well-upholstered easy chairs and a couch. Even then, the folded blanket on the floor next to the couch suggested that it had been used for more than just a place to sit.

"Are you familiar with the Rodebush-Bergenholm field?" Larry asked.

"No," Dr. Kelvin answered. "Sit down. Sit. I've seen Rodebush and Bergenholm's note in *Nature* but it doesn't give any of the essential details."

"The field is the best matter shield yet developed," Larry explained. "It was derived from a similarity between the equations for the spaceship wall shield and those for artificial gravity. However, instead of dissipating the energy impinging on the field, it's stored in the field, or more accurately, circulated through the matter encompassed by the field. The generator can actually use part of the energy stored inside the field to strengthen and maintain itself. However the field does require a conductor through it. The Hill, where the phototype is being installed, uses the alloy sheathing covering it as the conductor for the field. It's not as effective as it could be, so they're cleaning down the surface and copper plating. But until they finish, the alloy is there, and usable. As part of our program of upgrading Solarian Patrol bases and major spaceports, we propose to metal coat the surface over Copernicus and use a Rodebush-Bergenholm field as protection against bombardment."

"But that would be a major engineering project!" Dr. Kelvin said. "The Hill was sheathed during the Jovian Wars using a wartime budget. Sheathing just the inside

face of Copernicus Crater alone would be an incredibly difficult task, and financing it during peacetime. . . ." Dr. Kelvin shook his head.

"No, a sheath isn't necessary," Larry said. "An evaporative coating of copper a few micro-inches thick would be quite adequate. To the Rodebush-Bergenholm field it would be the equivalent of a sheath of several feet of alloy. With the field on, it would give a protection no thickness of alloy alone could give. The field is completely opaque to almost all radiation, so your blaster batteries and communication antennas will have to be moved. Mayor Love is clearing that with the appropriate Directors and Copernicus Control."

"I see why it would be useless on spacecraft," Dr. Kelvin said. "They would be completely blind." He pondered for a moment in thought and then turned to his desk. He called up from the micro-file inside the desk a series of maps of the crater, a couple references and the Rodebush/Bergenholm letter. After consulting these, he connected in the computer and sketched the problem in the drafting tank. A minute later he looked up at Lt. McQueen.

"To cover an area 50 miles long, 10 miles outward from the crater rim and 15 miles from the rim down to the floor with a thickness of 400 micro-inches of copper will require a minimum of *one million* cubic feet of material!" he said.

"That's an order of magnitude *thicker* than is required by my estimate," Larry said coolly. "That reduces your quarter million tons to around 25 thousand tons. I doubt if you need to cover that section all the way out to the southern entrance. It's only a single tunnel and represents about half the total area."

"Wrong. Even though that area isn't inhabited, the shock wave of a near miss could collapse the tunnels on us here," Dr. Kelvin answered.

"OK, then you need to cover more than 10 miles out from the top of the rim," Larry said.

Dr. Kelvin hesitated. "You're right. Let's check." He turned to the computer. "Assuming that the largest meteoroid they can start moving, without being detected and intercepted, is about 100 feet on a side . . . iron . . . I wonder if some kind of quake barriers . . . hmmm . . ."

A few minutes later he looked up again and said, "We go out about 10 miles on each side of the Dome and cut a slot a few feet wide to a depth of about a mile below our lowest level, which is about even with the crater floor, and plate the slot. That will save about 20% of the amount of copper needed but we'll probably use it anyway, since we won't be able to control the plating process in the slot as well as we can on the open surface. The slots will be a lot of trouble but we need them for shock protection."

"What weight of copper do you estimate?"

"Roughly 25 thousand tons."

Larry smiled. "When can you start?"

"Well, I've got a lot of work to do," Dr. Kelvin said, looking at the paperwork on his desk. He looked up and smiled. "How about an hour from now?"

"The *Himalaya* will deliver four cylinders of copper, 9 feet in diameter and 60 feet long, in three days. The remaining amount up to an additional 10 thousand tons will be delivered in any standard shape or form you require within three days after you order it. The Solarian Patrol has completely taken over the stock and facilities of Bridgeford Copper for this purpose. Here is a list of your Patrol charge numbers and a list of Earthside contacts. The generators will arrive with the copper. Here is an authorization from Mayor Love to use as many men from the research center and Copernicus Control as you need to do the job as fast as possible. OK?"

Dr. Kelvin took the papers. A happy look came over his face, like a boy who has been given a new bicycle. "Done!" he answered. "Can you find your own way out of here?"

As Lt. McQueen left, Dr. Kelvin had apparently forgotten his paperwork and was already on the intercom calling in his staff.

* * * *

After Lt. Larry McQueen and Dr. Kelvin left the office, Mayor Ron Love spent several minutes looking out at the silent picture of Copernicus Crater in contemplative thought. He spoke a few words to the office robot, and the picture of the crater was replaced with a recording of the recent Board of Directors meeting. Shown above the head of each of the directors was a chart showing the output of the lie detector attached to his chair. Ron learned little new that he hadn't summed up to Lt. McQueen and Dr. Kelvin as Director Griffin's reaction to certain words, especially "Icarus". The other directors reacted but in what seemed to be a normal manner.

Ron turned around and, using the keyboard on his desk, started calling personnel files from the Central File computer to the plate on his desk.

The records indicated that John Griffin had been a long time administrator of the Facilities Division. He had come rapidly up through the ranks and had been the Division Director for the last five years. Going through the departmental organization charts, Ron noted that the division secretary had changed about three months previously to a Virginia Lewis. About two months later there was a series of major departmental changes. "Rog," Ron said softly to himself. Flipping the intercom switch, Ron said, "Margurite, will you chase down Rog Philips and send him in here?"

Ron continued through the file on Griffin. Griffin had taken a vacation just before the departmental changes started. Ron punched in a key sentence and started through Griffin's security file. Nothing important.

He went through Virginia Lewis' file. She had apparently arrived from Uranium Incorporated's vacuum refining plant in Fauth crater about a month before she got the job. No boyfriends, no previous marriages, no bank references, no hobbies, no organizational memberships, no medical history, no nothing! A complete non-entity.

Ron looked up the file on the previous division secretary. She had left for Earth abruptly with a one day notice. Her bank record indicated she couldn't afford the ticket and certainly couldn't afford the shipping bill on her possessions, which she had sent after her. But they had been paid with funds transferred from Earth.

Ron flipped on the recorder. "A memo to Owen Hanovich," he said. "Subject: Security File. Classification: Secret. Please update the records of Hilda Johnson, ex-Division of Facilities secretary, with emphasis on financial condition, sources of income and present status."

Ron went on through the records. The men who had replaced those who left the Facilities Division were all from Fauth and all non-entities who had arrived in the last four months. Ron had just asked the Central File computer to sort out all the residents of Copernicus who had arrived from Fauth in the last year, when his secretary announced that Rog Philips was waiting in the reception room.

"Send him in," Ron said, and got up from his desk. He met Philips about halfway to the door and waved him into a chair before perching himself on the end of his desk.

"Rog, I want to talk to you about two matters, both of which are important to the security of the city and both of

which sound like I'm being nosy about personal affairs. About a month ago you came to me from the Facilities Division, where you were one of the chiefs, and asked for a job. I didn't ask you then for the details of why you were leaving, because I knew you. We've been friends for quite awhile. I considered it some kind of personal disagreement between you and John Griffin. Now I have reason to believe that it's more important than that and I want to know just what happened over there that so many people left or resigned."

"I'll be honest with you, Ron," Rog said. "I don't understand what happened." There was a long pause as Rog rubbed the back of his neck thoughtfully. "Everything was fine up to the time Griffin left on vacation. I was left in charge of the Division. When he got back, it was as if a new man appeared. He cut off all his old friends and wouldn't see them. He sent out a series of directives. He stopped calling weekly staff meetings. People got called on the carpet for no good reason. He was suddenly cold, hard and distant. An utterly changed man. Where normally he didn't worry about the details in my Electronics Department, now he was watching every move. People were reporting to him instead of me, and everything I did was wrong. So I got out."

"Where did he take his vacation?"

"I don't know. Somewhere on Tellus. Ask his secretary. She made the arrangements."

"What do you think of his secretary?"

"I have rarely seen such a little brass-plated bitch!"

"Alright. Consider this question carefully: Could the man who returned be someone disguised as John Griffin and the new secretary be helping him carry it off?"

There was a long pause. Ron was pleased by the look of questioning puzzlement that came over Rog's face.

"It fits. It fits perfectly. But who? Why would anyone do

something like that? Griffin's not rich nor politically powerful."

Ron told Rog about Lt. McQueen and the message he had brought from Solarian Patrol Headquarters.

"Now, there's something else that has to be done," Ron said. "I figure that you will know a good man for the job. Lt. McQueen brought some information about a secret moon base which was built somewhere here back before World War 3. We are going to have to send someone out to secure it."

"Before World War 3, huh. There's one guy in the Carpathian Club that would really like that job. Harvey Reinfield."

"Carpathian Club? Oh, yes. That's that group of mountain-climbing nuts we've got wandering around the landscape," Ron said with a sly smile. "You're a member, aren't you?"

"If you weren't an Honorary Member yourself, I'd punch you in the nose," Rog answered with a broad smile. "As I was saying, Harv's hobby for the last 10 years has been collecting stuff on the history of spaceflight before the Third World War. He spent his whole last vacation completely searching the Apollo landing areas. I've seen his file of old moon photos and it alone is incredible. So far he's hit a complete blank on the moon base. What did the Solarian Patrol come up with?"

"A diary and a photograph found in the cornerstone of an old church in Nebraska. No one knows how or why it got there but," Ron shrugged, "I have copies of the pages and a summary of the Patrol's guess as to the area they think the moon base is located in. It will still take some looking but this should limit that to a couple weeks at most."

"Where is it?"

"I can't tell you more than that it's somewhere north-

west of here, within 500 miles," Ron answered. "By the way, you are going to have to review some of the reports on internal safety. I would appreciate it if you gave the report of the Facilities Division your personal, special attention. I'm particularly interested in anything that has been omitted. Why don't you do your own report on Facilities? I'm sure Margurite has an extra copy of the outline of the material wanted. OK?"

"OK," Rog answered.

A few moments later Rog left and Ron returned to look at the results of the computer file search he had started. Other than those who came over each weekend to spend their paycheck, there were 17 people permanently in Copernicus who had come from Fauth during the last 6 months, and two in the 12 months prior to that. Ten people had traveled through to some other destination. Of those in Copernicus, eight were employed in the Facilities Division, six were employed elsewhere and five had dropped from sight. The credit chit file of the missing five was empty, so apparently someone else was providing food, clothing and housing for them.

At this point Ron called the Director of Security and turned the matter over to him with his recommendations. Ron interviewed Harv Reinfield and started him on his quest.

After Harv had left, Ron sat a long time looking at the picture of the crater and wondering if he really wanted to continue in the position of power he had wrested forcibly from his predecessor just before the start of the Fourth Jovian War. Wondered if it might be time now to step down and let one of the men he had so carefully watched take his place at the next election. The worlds were changing almost too fast to keep up with now. Mankind was spreading out to the stars. Maybe he should join

them. He looked at the stars in the sky and they looked coldly back at him.

No. No, there was no place for him out there. He had worked too long and too hard here to give it up and go out there and start over. Here was everything that was meaningful to him. Out there? Only new beginnings. Beginnings that it would take one or two lifetimes to bring to fruition. No, he had neither the time nor the patience to rebuild something new, only to hold onto what he had, knowing it would get relatively smaller and smaller and less and less important as time passed. Too old and too tired. Too inflexible. That's what he was.

But, by damn, he was going to hold onto what he did have.

He turned his back on the stars, back to his desk, refilled again for an uncountable time with resolve to be the best mayor ever, and to accomplish! "Let's see now," he said to no one in particular, "that old bat, Mrs. Stillwater, wants me to help her get a zone variance in our Xanadu area. We'll fix her wagon."

400 ADVENTURES FROM NOW
You'll be aboard the
Death Flight

RAY BRADBURY,

the Silver-Tongued Tale Teller of Blue Planet 3, asks of Red Planet 4:

Where Are the Golden-Eyed Martians?

Ray Bradbury dreamed up a whole race of Men from Mars when he wrote his science fiction masterpiece, THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, a generation ago. But Mariner 9's voyage burst Bradbury's romantic bubble. On these pages he speculates on the fate of his lost creatures.

SOME TIME in the next few years I will die and, with luck, be reborn.

Some time in the years ahead, the heroes I wrote about on Mars will cease to be, in one sense, and be reincarnated in another.

My slow death, and hoped-for rebirth, started November 13, 1972, when our Mariner 9 spacecraft first circumnavigated Mars to photograph its cold territories across which storms of dust drifted as if to blind our cameras.

The day before, at the California Institute of Technology, I had joked saying that when the dust at last blew away we would find mobs of Martians carrying signs which read:

BRADBURY WAS RIGHT!

But the dust has long since gone off and we see Mars clear, and my ancient cities are not there, nor the blue hills, nor the strange praying mantis devices and machines that were once my dream.

How does it feel to die and, please God, come back to

life in one's own time? I am asked the question often now.

Why am I asked?

Because, when I was 26 years old, I began to write the history of Mars as I imagined it might be in the year 1999.

When I finished all the bits and pieces, I laid them out in a strange mosaic called *The Martian Chronicles.*

Published in 1950, and in print every day of those years since, it was not meant to be a prediction of Things to Come. I was out to prevent futures, not make them. It was an ecological novel printed in the days before that word was a dead horse beaten in the urban streets of America. Like my great-great French grandfather Jules Verne, I had contrived a Cautionary Tale which said:

Don't do this, do that. Behave better. Walk taller. Know love. Live forever.

My Martians, my Mars, were first cousins to the Martians invented in the fabulous John Carter novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Though you won't find these books on school reading lists, or even on most public library shelves, Burroughs was and is the most influential writer, bar none, of our century. His books have romanced generations of boys into dreams and those dreams into facts and those facts into sciences. All of the astronomers, chemists, biologists and astronauts of the last 60 years are the seed-product of Edgar Rice Burroughs who wrote a bad style but a fine dream.

My dream, *The Martian Chronicles,* recounted a series of landings on Mars by various rocket expeditions which met strange fates, vanished or survived to become a new generation of Martians.

For some 25 years now, my *Chronicles* has enjoyed some favor. But now, not without a touch of friendly malice, people ask: what will become of you? your book? your wondrous, gold-coin-eyed Martians?

I have delayed answering.

But now the long dusts are settling on Mars. The old pocked planetary face clears. Truth shines back to Earth.

And my Martians must to their tombs, I with them, hoping, like Lazarus, to be summoned forth anew as what?

As mythology.

The answer is surprising but, finally, obvious.

When the ancient gods of the Greeks and Romans died, and were buried after being stoned by Christians, they did not stay dead. As quickly as Christ, they issued from their tombs to live new lives. They did not go back to Olympus, but chose to live amongst us, in our minds, on our tongues but above all in our hearts. Their names are household names. We name our automobiles, our ships, our missionary rocket craft for them. Their fire chariot, driven by Apollo, circles us to the Moon, and one day soon, old Mars.

Do I dare believe that my Martians, wraith-like to begin with, with eyes like ancient monies, dusky of skin, sweet of voice, quiet of demeanor, will go with Grecian ghosts and rise up with Roman haunts? I would wish it so. And why not? These are my children. No man suffers the death of his offspring easily. If I can save mine, I will bend to the edge of the grave and stretch out my hand to do so.

Better, the hands and desires and dreams of others may do the job for me. It is too early to tell.

My people, my characters, my stories, must suffer the sea change then from Possible Future to mythological but Immediate Past.

Is the ego that suggests this insufferable? A touch.

But forgive me for hoping that long after Mars is colonized and I am dead, my Martians will, late nights, come down out of the shallow hills to visit the new towns we will build up there. They will blow in dusts by the alum-

inum shanties where tomorrow's child may, against parental orders, read my *Chronicles* by flashlight under the covers, and shiver to think that my gods are blowing by in blue steams and white fires toward an alien morning.

Not created as gods, no, not made up by me as myths. But only my enthusiasms, instructions and warnings about the New New World where we must go by century's end.

Jules Verne lived to see but a few of his special fine dreams fleshed out in the world.

H. G. Wells lives to see many of his own calamitous Scriptures fall upon the Earth. He turned his face away.

I, and some few others like myself, have been fortunate to have lived into an age that cries destruction in a great atomic voice, but speaks salvation with yet a louder decibel, that of the rocket thrusting aside chaos, to prove the territories of eternity for us all.

And in all this, perhaps, my hubris is immense, my vanity incredible, my ego beyond tolerance. If so, Death will chop me well, and my Martians with me. We will be permanently laid and marbled and left. And no risings up, reincarnations, spirit-rappings, Ouija seances or Lazarus revivals ever, for me or mine.

Name it mere fancy, then. But a great mechanical robot goose tread on my future grave last night. I shuddered and sneezed. My bone marrow stirred its old sea dusts. On these nonfactual intuitions I must place my hopes for my generations of Martians whom no man has seen nor woman known but some children imagined. My fate must rest in young dreams by day and the special beauty of nightmares at dusk. By some strange literary mouth-to-mouth breathing, my stifled dears, my golden-eyed creatures, may make it into the 21st century.

Or if God allows, and the Greek and Roman deities, too, perhaps my Martians will cross time's desert to the 22d century, or those very stars we will surely touch 2600

years after a Child was born who became a Man who became a truly splendid dream.

Heady company, all of it. Probably impossible, most of it.

In the face of the Void, do please permit me: three cheers for *my* Martians—demigods perhaps, myhtological maybe.

The rest is silence, and waiting.

500 ADVENTURES FROM NOW
It's action with the
Cappins Corps

grav-lav: An antigravity "shower" which permits one to shake all the dirt right off the body.

Ferraneigh (rhymes with fur-*Ann*ie): Town near Keyloghal on the planet Mirsal 2 (PR 51).

Keyloghal (rhymes with key-*Mo*gul): Village in Lilly territory, Mirsal 2 (PR 51).

"a real skunker" (21st Cent. slang): "It stinks to high heaven!"

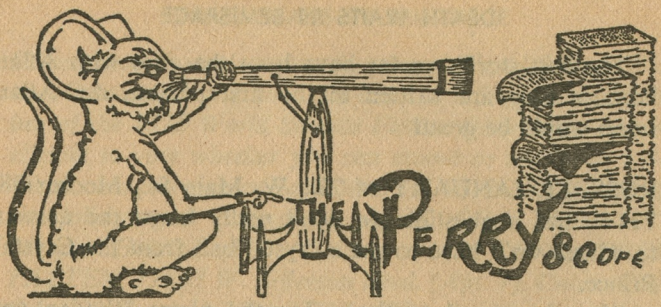
laundy (verb; 21st Cent. slang): "Come clean"; as formerly "spill it, let's have it, make a clean breast of it." In the 21st Century one might say, "OK, let's laundy it," or "It's laundy time." (Undoubtedly a corruption of "laundry".)

Ras Tschubai (rhymes with *chew*-buy): A member of Perry Rhodan's Mutant Corps with teleportational powers. Born in Africa, this Afroterranian is dark-skinned, very tall, lean & powerful. His aging process was arrested around age 30 by biological cell shower and later he received the cell activator treatment which made him immortal.

Tako Kakuta (rhymes with taco ha-*hoot*-ah): Japanese born mutant who by means of mental concentration is able to transfer himself from one location to another. He

is small and of slight physique, his forward-jutting forehead giving him a childlike appearance. He has had the same shower/activator treatment as his fellow member of the Mutant Corps, Ras Tschubai.

Heet-Ri (pronounced Heat-Rye): The 6th planet of a double star system situated 376 light-years from Krela. It has been described as a dreary-looking oxygen world, an abandoned Arkonide settlement. Mysterious ½-mile-high monuments are randomly distributed over the surface of the planet, mute remnants of a pre-Arkonide civilization which once flourished there, impressive landmarks that have survived 10,000 years of aging while their makers have disappeared in the maelstrom of the millennia.



A LIVELY LETTER from JOHN WARWICH starts us off. John lives at 1050 Zolezzi Lane, Reno/NV 89502.

I think PR is something unique, fantastic, unparalleled in the course of human history (future & past) plus it's written pretty well. Now for the Complaint Dept.

PR is good but there are a few inconsistencies that mess it up, such as the stories that concern Perry "appropriating" the serum to prolong Khrest & Thora's lives (43-44 & 38). In 38, Keklos completes the first stage of developing the serum at the end of the 20th century. In #43 four humans have been held in captivity since the 17th century. Now it seems to be rather hard to give people a life serum when it does not exist so I was just wondering if you could explain this part of PR's life. (*Can't—for the* life *of us. We translate & edit PERRY RHODAN but don't originate the plots.*—FJA & WA.)

Another thing I'd like to commend is the artwork. I think Morrow's work is great and if he were to just happen to make a few posters they will sell like hotcakes. (*As the result of a PERRY RHODAN seminar held in New York City last August, we can tell you to watch out for some "hotcakes" from Gray Morrow. Poster-size "pancakes". Of course, we can only tell you this . . .* syrup*titiously.*)

The best stories so far have been the ones with Atlan because they are written in the first person. An Atlan series would be great!

RUSSELL JANUARY of 221 W. Main St., Moore/OK 73160 has a question we don't really know the answer to. Guess we'll have to get a crystal ball from the Crystal Prince.

What happened to those 7 metal plates Rhodan got out of the Time Vault in issue #6? He gave them to Khrest & Thora because the positronic brain on the *Stardust 2* would not translate them for him because his brainwave pattern was different than the rulers of the universe, which, according to the brain, was the Arkonides. That was the last I heard of them. (*Patience, the 7 Lost Plates will be back in Adventure 497. No, don't take that seriously —I just made it up for lack of any actual information.*)

DON HORST gives his age as 16 and signs himself "Perry Sincerely":

#50's story was the perfect one for the Anniversary issue! I can't wait to see who the Unknown are and I am telling you now that I am renewing my subscription as soon as I can save the solars!

As to posters of the gang, I would buy them if I had to pawn my copies of "Dune" & "Dune Messiah" to do it.

I would like to lambast (and I use the word lightly) "Mister" Racine on his mash note about "This World is Taboo". I enjoyed the story and say Racine is full of sour skapes and has the disposition of a frogh and undoubtedly looks like a bomboo or a kikki.

I also think this saga and not the "Foundation" trilogy deserves the Hugo award for the best all-time series! When is *PR* GOING TO GET ITS OVER-LATE HUGO!!!!

(When enough readers join the annual World Science Fiction Convention and vote. To become a Supporting Member of the 1975 World Science Fiction Convention and be eligible to vote whether you can attend or not, send a $3 check or money order payable to AUSSIECON to any of the following 3 individuals: JACK CHALKER, 5111 Liberty Heights Ave., Baltimore/MD 21207; FRED PATTEN, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. (Apt. 1), Culver City, CA 90230; or JOHN MILLARD, 86 Broadway Ave. (Apt. 18), Toronto, Ontario M4P 1T4, Canada.)

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